

WALKING TOGETHER...
IN THE FOOTSTEPS
OF THE POOR APOSTLES

FORMATION IN MONTFORTIAN LIFE

VOLUME I

COMPANY OF MARY
2005

FOREWORD

The Company of Mary is being called into existence for 300 years now. The newly ordained Father de Montfort's dream of a small and poor band of good missionaries first took shape with the vocation of Brother Mathurin Rangedard in 1705. Three hundred years later men both young and not so young still follow St. Louis-Marie in the footsteps of the poor apostles. This new project for *Formation in Montfortian Life* is destined for confreres of every age, for confreres of today and tomorrow. It aspires to pass on Montfort's dream in all its richness and to offer the confreres every possibility to incarnate that dream ever more fully each day of their lives.

Essentially *Formation in Montfortian Life* is about ongoing formation, permanent formation. "Ongoing formation is the daily process of being shaped as a Montfort Missionary, the daily journey of conversion which is inherent in our religious and Montfortian consecration. Consequently, formation is not simply the concern of those who accompany new members in the initial stages of the process of entering the congregation. Formation is not simply a matter for novice masters and other formators. Formation is the continual concern of every confrere. Each one of us is called to walk the path of ongoing formation each day" (n. 75).

This first Volume presents from various perspectives the icon or the portrait of the Montfort Missionary. St. Louis-Marie was the first to image this icon, the good father who left his features on the family portrait. Each one of us has received the grace and vocation to embody this icon today in our lives and ministries, as a gift for the Church and the world. The present text is the fruit of several years of reflection and consultation on all levels of the congregation. Though marked by the limits of human language and reason, it succeeds admirably in unveiling our family portrait, in inviting us to contemplate and integrate the dream and charism of St. Louis-Marie de Montfort in this new millennium.

This new project for *Formation in Montfortian Life* officially enters into effect on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. May she who is full of grace, transparent of grace, by her maternal love help each of us to bring to birth the charism of her Company. May St. Louis-Marie and Blessed Marie-Louise of Jesus find in us faithful companions in the footsteps of the poor apostles.

William Considine, smm
Superior General

Rome, December 8, 2004
Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

To you, who just found your *first love*,
the spark which inspires you to follow Christ...

To you, who have already journeyed part of the way,
and who might hear the Lord say to you:
I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first...

What characterizes humanity is the journey...
How many times, can one read in the Gospel:
Jesus is on the way and his disciples follow him...
If you have confidence in the Guide,
If you are you willing to walk,
If you do not stop,
The future is open.
The goal is Life.

Whether you are at the very beginning of the journey
Or far along on the path,
The love which has urged you to follow Jesus lives always.
It is up to you to rediscover it and to maintain it.
That is the task of your entire life!

Even today, Montfort repeats
his ardent prayer for you:
What then am I asking for?
Liberos! Men who are free!
Free with the freedom of God!

To walk
Together,
In the footsteps of the poor apostles.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Formation

The approach to Montfortian formation which we present here is in line with the most recent reflection of the Church, according to which “The times in which we are living call for a general rethinking of the formation of consecrated men and women, which is no longer limited to one period of life.”¹ According to the instruction *Starting Afresh from Christ*, “formation is no longer only a teaching period in preparation for vows [or for priesthood], but also represents a *theological* way of thinking of consecrated life,”² that is to say as a long and progressive formation of the new man, who will be able to take on the mind of Christ, and whose heart will be capable of beating in harmony with divine sentiments.

Ongoing formation is not what comes after initial formation, but, as paradoxical as it seems, it precedes it and makes it possible, it is the generative idea which keeps it and gives it its identity. That is why initial formation and ongoing formation constitute a unified *journey of faith*. This path is one of continuous formation of the commitment of the believer, the human being called to become adult in faith, in the concrete circumstances and the originality of his life. This process evidently values that charismatic heritage received from the tradition of the institute in which one asks to be admitted and to spend one’s life.

The Title

The general title “*Together... in the footsteps of the poor apostles*” is an expression dear to Father de Montfort. This dynamic image reminds us that formation is a *vital process* by which the person is *converted in the depths of his being* to the Word of God and at the same time *learns the art of searching* for the signs of God in the reality of the world.

Plan and Structure of the Document

Our Project of Formation presents itself as a document that is theoretical and practical; “inspired by [the founding] charism... [it intends] to establish a method, characterized by spiritual and pedagogical wisdom.”³ It seeks to progressively bring the Montfortian charism to life.

The Project of Formation consists of two volumes.

The present volume presents the inspirational principles of Montfortian formation, the spirit of Montfortian formation. After having looked at the missionary itinerary of Eternal Wisdom, we commit ourselves as Montfortians in the footsteps of the poor Apostles, our eyes fixed on Father de Montfort and on the Company of Mary which was his constant desire (First Part). Then we follow this process of formation for the whole of our lifetime (Second Part). Lastly we form a Company of confreres coming from the four corners of the world, who journey

¹ *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 15.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Vita Consecrata*, 68.

together as pilgrims (Third Part).

The second volume will offer the norms and guidelines for formation. It will treat different aspects of the various stages: vocation animation, pre-noviciate, noviciate, period of temporary vows, preparation for perpetual vows, the first years of full apostolic involvement, young adulthood, the period of maturity, advanced age.

- I. For each stage: nature, goal and objectives (on the part of the Congregation and of the individual); programme and development according to diverse dimensions, content and “Ratio studiorum”; means and resources; juridical and administrative norms.
- II. The Formators: importance, role, preparation and updating.
- III. Particular questions: Formation of superiors; adult vocations; period of crises and illness; discipline; formation and psychology; lay people in formation, etc.

ABBREVIATIONS USED

WORKS OF MONTFORT

| | |
|-----|---|
| FC | Letter to the Friends of the Cross |
| H | Hymns |
| L | Letters |
| LCM | Letter to the Members of the Company of Mary |
| LEW | The Love of Eternal Wisdom |
| LS | The Book of Sermons |
| PM | Prayer for Missionaries |
| RM | Rule of the Missionary Priests of the Company of Mary |
| RW | Primitive Rule of the Daughters of Wisdom |
| SM | The Secret of Mary |
| SR | The Secret of the Holy Rosary |
| TD | True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin |

THE MONTFORTIAN TODAY

| | |
|---|---------------|
| C | Constitutions |
| S | Statutes |

For references to the Bible, common abbreviations will be used.

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VOLUME I

**INSPIRATIONAL PRINCIPLES:
THE SPIRIT OF MONTFORTIAN FORMATION**

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VOLUME I

**INSPIRATIONAL PRINCIPLES:
THE SPIRIT OF MONTFORTIAN FORMATION**

FIRST PART
LEARNING THE PATH

THE MISSIONARY JOURNEY OF INCARNATE WISDOM

*When peaceful silence lay over all,
and night had half run its swift course,
your all-powerful Word, O Lord, leaped down from heaven,
from the royal throne.*
(Wisdom 18:14-15)

*... Mary is the most perfect and the most holy of all creatures,
and Jesus, who came to us in a perfect manner,
chose no other road for his great and wonderful journey.*
(TD 157)

The Pilgrimage of Wisdom. The most significant journey for Christians is the pilgrimage which the Word of God made to come to live among us. He whom the world could not contain, became flesh in the womb of Mary so that he could be in our midst. Mary's trusting response to God's initiative became the route by which Divine Wisdom became incarnate. This humble path of self-emptying became a way of salvation for us.

Moved with deep compassion for the plight of humanity (LEW 41), Wisdom set out on this journey toward us. In his reflection on the salvific pilgrimage of the Word, Montfort emphasizes the excess of love which draws Wisdom to us. Wisdom Incarnate is the one who pursues us (LEW 64-65). This torrential outpouring of God's infinite goodness finds a home in Mary (LEW 107).

The missionary journey of the Incarnation is the blossoming of the movement of Wisdom which Montfort discovered in the Scriptures. The Wisdom of God is always on the move toward us, looking everywhere as a wanderer, desiring to find those who seek her and who long to draw close to God (cf. LEW 47 citing Wis 6:16). Incarnate Wisdom is itinerant, moving toward humanity.

The Itinerancy of Incarnate Wisdom. Wisdom "makes her rounds, seeking those worthy of her, and graciously appears to them in the ways, and meets them with all solicitude" (Wis 6:16). She is the one who makes the first move; she waits in the early morning for the one who seeks her, sitting by his very own gate (Wis 6:13-14).

Montfort was quite taken with the desire of Wisdom for us. "In pursuit of humanity, she [Wisdom] sometimes hastens along the highways, sometimes scales the highest mountain peaks, sometimes comes to the city gates, sometimes enters the public squares, in the midst of gathering people, crying out as loudly possible: O people, O children of humanity, it is to you I have been calling for so long; it is you whom I am addressing, it is you whom I desire, you whom I seek; you whom I claim as my own. Listen and come to me; I want to make you happy" (LEW 66).

This excess of love is enfleshed in the life and ministry of Jesus. The compassion of Jesus impelled him to be constantly moving from place to place to proclaim the kingdom, going out to people who need healing, seeking sinners and those who are rejected.

The missionary journey of Wisdom Incarnate in Jesus invited a corresponding movement towards him. People drew near to Jesus. The apostles left their nets to follow him, and their daily journey with him on the roads of Palestine became the pathway of their formation as disciples.

Jesus' life was a pilgrimage of service that led him to empty himself even unto death. The extent to which Wisdom drew close to humanity is seen in Jesus' embrace of poverty and the cross (LEW 70). His ministry brought him on pathways that led to Calvary by the same logic of love through which he became flesh. By this wisdom that seemed like folly, by this true wisdom, Jesus' weakness became the strength by which he conquered sin and death.

The missionary movement that led Jesus to the cross did not cease in the light of the resurrection. The Risen Jesus gathered the fearful and scattered community of apostles and sent this little flock out in the power of the Spirit to carry on his mission. The fire of the Spirit enabled them to set out on new paths proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. Even now, the pilgrimage of the Word continues as he gathers people of every race, language and way of life to take their place in the eternal banquet of the Kingdom.

As Missionaries of the Company of Mary, we are called to recognize the journey which Incarnate Wisdom makes toward us. We are drawn to the place where Wisdom dwells – Jesus Wisdom made flesh and living in Mary, Jesus seeking out those who are in need, Jesus crucified and risen, Jesus reaching to the ends of the earth in the members of his Body.

We respond to Wisdom who comes toward us by taking on the journey of discipleship, moving together in the footsteps of the poor apostles. We recognize that Wisdom is still on pilgrimage within us. Our particular response is illumined by Montfort's insights into the way that leads to union with the Lord. The same route that Wisdom took becomes the road that we travel.

“... He Who Is deigned to come down to us who are not and turned our nothingness into God, or He Who Is. He did this perfectly by giving and submitting himself entirely to the young Virgin Mary, without ceasing to be in time He Who Is from all eternity. Likewise it is through Mary that we, who are nothing, may become like God by grace and glory. We accomplish this by giving ourselves to her so perfectly and so completely as to remain nothing, as far as self is concerned, and to be everything in her, without any fear of illusion” (TD 157).

Montfort is so convinced of the importance Mary as the pilgrim way to God, he is able to say:

“Show me a new road to our Lord, pave it with all the merits of the saints, adorn it with their heroic virtues, illuminate and enhance it with the splendour and beauty of the angels, have all the angels and saints there to guide and protect those who wish to follow it. Give me such a road and truly, truly I boldly say – and I am telling the truth – that instead of this road, perfect though it be, I would still choose the immaculate way of Mary” (TD 158).

We Montfort Missionaries seek to be formed continually as we walk this road together. We follow, in our turn, the missionary journey of Incarnate Wisdom in a pilgrimage which has God as its beginning and end.

Chapter 1

MONTFORT A WITNESS OF APOSTOLIC BOLDNESS

*Traveller, what do you see?
A light quenched,
A man consumed
by the fire of Charity
Who became all things to all people
Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort
If you ask what was his life:
There was none more holy;
His penance: none more austere;
His zeal: none more ardent;
His devotion to Mary:
none more like St. Bernard.
A priest of Christ, he showed forth
Christ in his action, and preached
Him everywhere in his words.
Indefatigable,
he rested only in the grave.
Father of the poor,
Protector of orphans,
Reconciler of sinners.
His glorious death
was the image of his life;
As he had lived, so he died.
Ripe for God, he passed to heaven
April 28th 1716
Aged 43 years.*

[Epitaph for the tomb of St. Louis-Marie de Montfort; original Latin text given by Joseph Grandet (1994; p. 149-150) or by Charles Besnard (1981; p. 504*).

The meaning of a life

1. “Traveller, what do you see?” The epitaph of St. Louis de Montfort poses a bold and direct question. The response describes in a striking way the life and the spirit of our founder: a man consumed by the love of God, on fire with the message of the Gospel, alive with a tender devotion to Mary. For Montfort, this epitaph describes the significance of a faithful journey fulfilled.

2. **From the Waters of Baptism to an Apostolic Life.** The epitaph points back to the journey of Montfort’s life. The path that led Montfort to this tomb began at another tomb: the baptismal font where Louis Grignon died with Christ so as to rise with him. This pathway led him to take seriously the promises of his baptism and to live them to the full. The years of his development led him to respond to a call to a ministry in which he read the signs of his own times and invited his brothers and sisters to renew the promises of their baptism continually and without compromise, and to allow those promises to shape their lives.

Montfort made a pilgrimage from the waters of baptism to a life in which he sought to be a disciple of Jesus more perfectly. As he walked this pilgrimage, Montfort discovered God’s overwhelming love expressed in the mystery of the Incarnation, in Jesus, Eternal Wisdom made flesh in Mary and come to live among us. He found in Mary the model of human response to God’s movement toward us and a mother who could show us the way to her Son. As a mystic he devoted himself to contemplate God’s plan of salvation and Mary’s role in it. The fruit of Montfort’s contemplation nourished and illuminated his message as a preacher of the gospel. Thus he became a master of sure doctrine, a guide to spiritual wisdom, and a preacher overflowing with zeal, imagination and creativity.

3. **The apostolic journey of St. Louis Marie was a participation in the Paschal Mystery.** An overview of Montfort’s life, especially after his ordination, makes us see how he grew and let himself be moulded by the Spirit in the different trials and “crises” which he went through – “I am like a ball in a game of tennis” (L 26). He lived through so many failures, misunderstandings, rejections. These events were for him so many deaths and resurrections, grains of wheat fallen on the ground. Let us recall some examples.

His period of inactivity at Nantes, the first disillusion frustrating his missionary fervour as a young priest, enabled him to clearly articulate his deepest desires and feelings (L 5). From his description of the state of his soul, we get some hints about what his life will be, and we can already foresee the birth of the Company of Mary.

The difficulties and failures encountered in Poitiers and in Paris between 1703 and 1706 (misunderstandings with his former friends and spiritual directors, dismissals from hospitals, being banned from preaching, expulsion from the diocese of Poitiers...), provoked in him doubt about his apostolic orientation. This “crisis” drove him onto the road to Rome and to the feet of the Holy Father, where he received confirmation of his missionary intuitions (RM 56).

Upon his return to France, he worked with the missionary team of Monsieur Leuduger for a time... before they asked him to leave. This new failure led him to the hermitage of Saint-Lazare, where he formed the first “Montfortian” community, and it gave him the freedom to be himself in becoming an apostolic missionary according to his own style (RM 50).

Two years later, he accomplished his missionary masterpiece: the Calvary of Pontchâteau. A once in a lifetime undertaking! His success was his failure! His Calvary was his cross! With everything collapsing, he remained firm in trial and came out of it victorious... Paradoxically, what should have broken him and destroyed him gave him a greater apostolic maturity. “Lifting high the cross at the depth of his heart, even higher than the one on the hill of the Madeleine, Montfort dreamed only of continuing the work of the missions...”⁴ He was impelled to go elsewhere, with “the bright and burning flame of the holy gospel in his mouth and the holy rosary in his hand” (PM 12).

An appeal to continue a mission

4. Montfort was a man who set out on the roads to proclaim the message of God’s love. He invited Christians to deepen their faith, and he devoted himself to renew the face of the Church. “Traveller, what do you see?” It is fitting that his epitaph is addressed to a traveller, someone on the move. For Montfort, this epitaph marks the meaning and motivation of his life. Do we, his disciples, read in these words an appeal and a challenge which motivate us? Are we not travellers and pilgrims seeking to read the signs of our own time, and to respond to those needs with our own gifts and limitations? In the midst of our failures and successes, we too participate, like all Christians, in the paschal mystery; we die and rise with Jesus (cf. PM 25). And since our own particular vocation is to live this mystery in the footsteps of Montfort, his epitaph poses questions to us: Do you dare to continue the route of the one who finished his journey here? Do you believe that for you, Montfort’s disciple, his tomb can be a womb, a place where one is born and reborn as a Montfortian?

5. We are not clones of Montfort; we cannot expect to simply repeat his words or mimic his actions. Neither are we Montfortians interchangeable parts of a machine. Each of us has a unique personality, a unique life history. Born in a specific time and place, in different cultures, we seek to follow Jesus in the footsteps of the poor apostles. Our specific response to Christ has drawn us on pilgrimage together. Our pilgrimage, unique though it may be, has been inspired by the example and insights of Montfort and his followers.

Looking upon the striking example of Montfort’s life and ministry provokes us to look also at ourselves. Do we dare ask others the same question about ourselves who follow in the footsteps of St. Louis today? Do we dare ask those among whom we live and minister, “What do you see?” Would their response paint a portrait of a Montfortian of today, someone carrying on Montfort’s tradition of evangelisation, of concern for the poor, of seeking after Jesus living in Mary?

By marking out for ourselves a path of conversion and ongoing formation we will elicit responses in which Montfort would recognize himself.

⁴ Le Crom, *Un Apôtre marial – St Louis Marie-de Montfort*, p. 234.

Chapter 2

THE ICON OF THE MONTFORT MISSIONARY

*They will be true apostles of the latter times
to whom the Lord of Hosts will give eloquence
and strength to work wonders.*

(TD 58)

6. We Montfortians share a common tradition and a common mission. Consequently, it is possible to sketch a portrait of a Montfort Missionary who is living out of this tradition and taking his place within this common mission today. This portrait reveals to us what we have in common, while respecting the uniqueness of each person with the individual gifts each confrere brings to the Congregation and its mission. At the very heart of our diversity, we rediscover a kind of family resemblance to which we are called and in which we recognize ourselves. This family resemblance emerges from:

- the vision of Montfort,
- the life and the work of confreres who have responded to the call of Montfort throughout our history,
- contemporary reflections on our life and mission,
- the diverse ways we live out our consecration as Montfortian religious responding to the needs of the church and the world today.

An Icon Both Ideal and Practical

7. What emerges from these sources is a family portrait that is more icon than photograph. An icon does not seek to give a precise and realistic representation but rather leads the viewer to meditate on the ideals and spiritual realities it discloses. In a similar way, the family portrait of the Montfort Missionary which follows is not a detailed picture of reality. Nor is it an attempt to impose a rigid pattern on all the members of the Congregation. Rather, it is an icon which invites us to gaze on aspects of our identity and our heritage which make a claim on us. As an icon, it can draw us into the depths of its mystery and serve as a guide, both ideal and eminently practical, for our life and our ministry.

8. Saint Louis Marie carried in his heart an image of those whom he desired to join the Company of Mary. He describes it in the *Triptych* (*The Prayer for Missionaries*, the *Manuscript Rule* and the *Letter to the Members of the Company of Mary*). This portrait is reaffirmed in our Constitutions, which stresses that our name – Missionaries of the Company of Mary – reminds us who we are: members of an apostolic community, consecrated by Baptism and vows, sent together on mission, devoted to Mary into whose hands we entrust our entire selves (cf. C 8-43).⁵ The lives Montfort Missionaries who have been guided by this image reflect certain distinctive aspects which make up our “family resemblance.” What do we see when we look upon this icon of the Montfortian apostle of today? Some details of the icon are described here.

⁵ See also Fr. Gerard Lemire, *Montfortian Identity*, S.G. 6/1985.

Significant Details

9. **Eyes fixed on Incarnate Wisdom who journeys toward us.** We have been seized and inflamed by God who shows us an excess of love in the Wisdom of God made flesh in Jesus. We recognize in the mystery of the Incarnation both an invitation to be united with God and a message of hope to share with others.⁶ We are people who are captivated by God who desires to be with us.

10. **Ears attentive to Mary's response.** – “The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a young virgin named Mary” (Lk 1:26-27). Again and again we listen to the dialogue between the angel Gabriel and Mary. The telling and retelling of the story resounds in our hearing. Here is the crucial moment of history! Here, on God's initiative, is the desire of the Word to empty himself in order to come into our midst. Here is God's choice to be vulnerable and to depend on a woman who trusts in God's promises. Here is Mary's free and open response, whose “Yes” makes room for the Word of God to take flesh within her.

11. **A heart consecrated to Jesus and entrusted to Mary.** – The love of God, become flesh in Jesus through the consent of Mary, evokes a response in us. We desire to give ourselves to Wisdom Incarnate, and to leave everything to follow Jesus. Our vocation as Montfortians is a conscious appropriation of our baptismal consecration, further expressed in the vows of our religious consecration. We offer our hearts and our entire selves to Christ Jesus without reserve.

12. Our Montfortian consecration places us within the Trinity's dynamism of self-giving love which motivates and colours everything that we do. Day by day we give ourselves to God, who has given us his Son. We live “in the light and fire of the daily journey of an entire lifetime that is lived in consecration to Jesus, eternal and incarnate Wisdom, through the hands of Mary”.⁷ We allow ourselves to be shaped by the Holy Spirit in Mary, who is the mould where the disciples are formed. Our consecration influences our mission, our way of living together, our prayer, the way we face the challenges and difficulties of life, and the way we offer a prophetic critique of that which is sinful in our world.

13. We entrust our hearts to Mary whom we recognize as our mother and model. We learn from her to live as disciples and we allow her to guide our steps.⁸ “Devotion to Mary is an integral part of [our] spiritual life and apostolate” (C 39). Mary is the divine mountain upon which we dwell. It is here with her that we learn to pray, to listen to Christ, and to enter into the mystery of his death and resurrection (PM 25). Mary is our reference point, active in each stage of our lives.⁹ Like Mary, we learn to depend upon Divine Providence (PM 24, RM 16-17) and to seek poverty of spirit (LCM 6-11).

14. **The gospel issuing from our mouths.** We are called to become the children of Mary whom Montfort foresaw: “They will be ministers of the Lord, who, like flaming fire, will kindle everywhere the fires of divine love... They will be true apostles of the latter times to whom the Lord of hosts will give eloquence and strength to work wonders” (TD 56, 58). Montfort

⁶ See William Considine “The Spiritual and Apostolic Charism of St. Louis-Marie and the Montfort Missionaries Today, S.G. 01/2001, 0.6.

⁷ Ibid., 0.9.

⁸ Cf. Ibid., 1.0 ff.

⁹ Cf. Ibid., 1.1-1.3.

envisaged us as people surrendered to the Spirit, with “the gospel issuing from their mouths like a bright and burning flame” (PM 12, 17), who grow day by day in an ability to preach from the abundance of their hearts (PM 22, RM 44-49). This Spirit plants within us a desire to evangelise by word and example.

15. Hands raised in prayer. Our apostolic prayer is a significant means of formation (PM 21, RM 28-33). We take up Montfort’s invitation to enter more deeply into contemplation of the Word of God by meditating on the scriptures and savouring the mysteries of salvation. Our personal and communal prayer finds its source and summit in the celebration of the Eucharist, in which we unite our offering with the self-offering of Jesus. Our daily pilgrimage is charged with the presence of God, and the Liturgy of the Hours provides the rhythm for our welcome of God’s presence. The rosary serves as a Christocentric and contemplative prayer that leads us into “the depth of the Gospel message in its entirety.”¹⁰ It is a form of prayer that is grounded in tradition and yet at the same time is open to creative expressions.

16. Our apostolic prayer is constantly shaped by our Montfortian consecration and by the concerns of the people whom we serve in our mission. We are continually seeking to discover patterns of prayer which enable us to experience a greater intimacy with God and which transform us into better disciples of Jesus. Our apostolic prayer enables us to imitate Father de Montfort, uniting in our hearts the fire of the mystic and the zeal of the apostle.

17. Standing at the foot of the Cross. We take our place in that small community which stands with Mary at the foot of the cross, which becomes for us a school of wisdom. Like Montfort, we are no strangers to the cross of Christ. As Friends of the Cross, we become living stones ready to be shaped and chiselled under the hammer of the cross (cf. FC 28). This availability teaches us the wisdom of self-emptying love (Phil 2:1-11). We experience the cross as we face the challenges that come our way throughout our life’s journey.

18. Our embrace of the cross of Christ makes us able to live and preach in a prophetic manner, not encumbered by the ways of the world. It also places us on the path where we find true wisdom (RM 37-39, LEW 180). Our proclamation of the reign of Jesus brings us into a struggle with the false wisdoms of the world and the forces which oppose the gospel message (PM, 29-30). We participate in the cross of Christ when we challenge the false promises of these forces with the truth of Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom. Our preaching and our action call into question the injustice and selfishness which oppress too many people. Our nearness to those whom we serve, our communion with those who suffer and our special attention towards the poor (RM 2, 50), leads us to recognize the mystery of the cross in their lives.

19. Looking ahead to a church reformed and a world renewed. We are convinced that the message of Jesus which we proclaim can transform the world we live in, a world which seeks truth, freedom and peace, in place of passing whims, greed and violence. We bring the message of the gospel to those who have not heard it and to those who need to hear it in new ways. We seek to answer the call of the Church for a new evangelisation, and – following Montfort who received this mission from the Holy Father (cf. RM 56) – we strive for a more profound communion among the members of the Church which flows from a renewal of the promises of baptism.

¹⁰ Pope John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, (October 16, 2002), 1.

20. **Liberos, whose feet are guided by the Holy Spirit.** We entrust the care of our formation in freedom to the Holy Spirit and to Mary, his faithful spouse (cf. PM 15). Called to live in the freedom of the children of God, we strive to become the free men whom Montfort desired for his company, “men free as the clouds that sail high above the earth, filled with the dew of heaven and moving, without let or hindrance, according to the inspiration of the Spirit” (PM 9; cf. PM 7-12, RM 6). We are ready “to leave Jerusalem” like the apostles, so that the good news of Jesus might spread to the ends of the earth. Our itinerancy allows us to be available and prevents us from becoming too attached to our own accomplishments. It also provides a spiritual path of detachment for us to walk, as we recognize our own poverty and trust in Divine Providence. We are ready to be on the move (PM 10, RM 6) to bring the good news where it is needed, and we do this together.

21. **Setting out with others to proclaim the Good News of Christ to the Poor.** Our consecration as Montfortian religious gives rise to our participation in Jesus’ mission to proclaim the good news to the poor. We desire to tell the story of salvation in Christ and the story of Mary’s role in God’s plan. We proclaim this good news together as a company of men who are available to go where people are thirsting for the waters of life. We are ready to share the riches of our Montfortian spiritual heritage with our associates and other lay people because we believe that our world can benefit from Montfort’s perspective on the Gospel.¹¹

22. We are a diverse group of people gathered from many nations and cultures (PM 18), yet ready to work together as a congregation. We form a flock of peaceful doves, a flight of royal eagles, a swarm of honey bees, a herd of nimble deer, a pride of bold lions, a strongly disciplined army which Montfort imagined and for which he prayed (PM 18, 29). Our unity in the midst of differences serves as a witness to a world torn by conflict, division and intolerance.¹²

23. **An icon of hope.** Our experience of God, our living the consecration, and our participation in the mission of the congregation call us Montfortians to form a small band who have put aside fear and live in great hope (LCM 1-3, 5). This hope impels us to face the ambiguities and difficulties of our age and to take risks in order to do great things for God.

Gazing upon the Icon of Montfortian Apostles

24. This is but a glimpse at some details of the icon of the Missionaries of the Company of Mary. The outlines are those drawn by St. Louis de Montfort, the colours are those of the confreres who have embraced this way of life these past three hundred years, the light which illuminates it is a gift of God and his Providence.

25. The icon draws our attention to the living icons, the icons of flesh and blood who have allowed Montfortian spirituality and the charism of the Montfort Missionaries to shape their lives in different times and places. This icon beckons us out on the road of conversion and mission, and it guides our movements on the pathways of ongoing formation.

26. “Traveller, what do you see?” What do you see as you gaze upon this icon of the Montfortian apostle? Do you see some aspects of yourself – as you are or as you hope to be? Do you see an image of what we are and what we can become together? Do you see in this icon the image of

¹¹ Cf. Fr. Gérard Lemire, The present needs of formation, Circular Letter S.G. 04/1989, 2.3).

¹² Cf. Fr. Gérard Lemire, Circular Letter on the Occasion of Montfort’s Feast, S.G. 02/1990.

a Montfortian of today, the image of the Company of Missionaries Montfort desired with such eagerness?

Guided by the Icon Today

27. An icon is not a mirror. It does not simply reflect our face as it is. Rather, the icon invites us to look at it and, in looking, to enter into its mysteries and its possibilities. If we allow the power of this icon to take hold of us, we will not remain in the realm of idle dreams and wishful thinking. The power of the image is, in the end, practical. We can let this icon guide our decisions and our everyday actions. It can serve as both sign and map for the pilgrimage of our lives. The elements of this family portrait form a constellation by which we can navigate.

28. Montfort took time to grow into the person he became, through times of searching and questioning, through periods of rejection and misunderstanding, through experiences of ardent prayer. We are invited to live a similar experience of growing toward our ultimate fulfilment, according to the ways of God's plan. Formation at every stage of our life serves to help us become more of who we are: Missionaries of the Company of Mary, called to work together on mission, following after Montfort.

29. We each participate in this icon and family portrait according to our individual personalities with different gifts and particular limitations. Consequently, some confreres will reflect certain aspects of this image with a greater clarity, while other confreres will more immediately resemble other aspects. Through the gradual appropriation of our own identity and our mutual witness, we call each other to faithfulness. It is together that we can form the complete image.

30. Of course, we recognize that this image needs to be incarnated and made alive in all the particular circumstances in which we live and minister. This process of inculturation will further enrich the image of what it means to be a Montfort Missionary today. Yet from across the divide of language, culture and geographical distance, we will still be able to see in one another the family resemblance that distinguishes us as Montfortians. We seek to continually grow into the image of a real Montfortian so that Montfort would recognize in us those disciples for whom he yearned and waited and ardently prayed.¹³

¹³ Cf. Fr. William Considine, *Temporary and Perpetual Profession: From Novitiate to Definitive Commitment*, S.G. 02/1998, 10-20.

Chapter 3

THE PATH OF ONGOING FORMATION

Knowing and relishing the truth and getting others to relish it.
(MR 60)

BECOMING MONTFORTIAN APOSTLES TODAY ON A PILGRIMAGE OF ONGOING TRANSFORMATION

31. The icon of the Montfortian Apostle has several practical purposes. This icon can help us develop a clear image of who we are and who we are called to be in the midst of the world today. It can guide the path of our ongoing formation. It can aid in developing a Montfortian process of discerning the vocation of new members. The recognition of the family resemblance reflected in the icon can also create a stronger sense of communion among confreres living in diverse cultures.

32. If, each day, we make of our life a path of conversion in order to become the disciples that Father de Montfort desired, we will become witnesses of the Gospel who more and more resemble the Christ.

33. *Montfortian consecrated life is a path transformation in which one is being conformed to the Lord Jesus, Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom. It is a progressive assimilation of his attitudes toward the Father.*¹⁴ This evangelical and Montfortian ideal will only be attained if we accept to commit ourselves to a process of radical and total formation, the only true means of transforming the person.

34. *The transformation sought in a life of ongoing formation is holistic. Completeness and harmony make the apostolic man. Montfortian ongoing formation seeks the development of well rounded persons. Each step in formation, each educational experience, should stimulate a harmonious growth of the entire person, in all his dimensions. We are thus prepared to deal with the healthy tension which we find among the various demands of our maturity in Christ.*

35. *This transformation takes place over time. It brings about the discovery of the “youthfulness of spirit which lasts through time” and in the different seasons of life, and it “arises from the fact that at every stage of life a person seeks and finds a new task to fulfil, a particular way of being, of serving and of loving.”*¹⁵ “Precisely because it aims at the transformation of the whole person, it is clear that the *commitment to formation never ends.*”¹⁶

BECOMING REAL MONTFORTIANS IN THE REAL WORLD: DIMENSIONS AND ASPECTS OF THE PATH OF MONTFORTIAN FORMATION

¹⁴ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 65

¹⁵ *Vita Consecrata*, 70.

¹⁶ *Vita Consecrata*, 65.

Formation to a Distinctively Montfortian Consecrated Life

36. We ought to be *united by the same spirituality and charism*. In our congregation, each confrere is invited to walk a path of formation on which he becomes more and more the Montfortian which our founder desired. This formation includes a continual appropriation of Montfortian spirituality with the help of a careful reflection on the works of Montfort, the example of his own life, the history of the Congregation and the witness of other confreres. This reflection takes place in light of contemporary cultures and concerns. The confreres, with the help of provincials, superiors and formation personnel, must be the ones who initiate their appropriation of Montfortian life. They remain the primary agents of deepening it throughout the stages of adulthood.

37. It is by the study and the practice of our *Constitutions* and the *spirituality inherited from our founder* that we can assimilate what is proper to our institute, even to adopt a *characteristically Montfortian style of life and ministry*. This is not taught only through the study of rules and norms; it is the result of a communal experience, of a constant familiarity with the life of our founder and with our tradition. It is the result of a fraternal integration between experienced confreres and newer members. It is the fruit of a continual development of our sense of belonging to the congregation.

38. Like all those who are sent to proclaim the Good News, *we listen attentively to the Word of God in the Scriptures*, which draws us to meditation, contemplation and proclamation. Our continual study of the bible is motivated by the veneration which Montfort had for the Scriptures and by the desire we share with him to break the bread of the Word with our brothers and sisters.

39. Within the sacred text of the bible, there are several classic passages which serve as touchstones for Montfortian formation. These include the story of the Annunciation (Lk 1:26-38), Mary's hymn of praise in the *Magnificat* (Lk 1:46-55), St. Paul's meditation on the wisdom of the cross (1 Cor 1-2), and the hymn of Christ's self-emptying (Phil 2:1-11), to mention a few. We also give special attention to heritage of Wisdom literature in the Old Testament.

40. Like Montfort, we do everything *in communion with the Church*. Thus we faithfully follow the general directives given by the Church (universal and local) for the formation of religious and priests, while being careful to integrate in different programmes, in an organic and progressive manner, the elements which are specific to our charism and our spirituality.

41. In addition to the scriptural tradition and the tradition of the Church, the example and insights of St. Louis-Marie himself occupy a central place among our Montfortian traditions. Our specific formation obviously draws inspiration from his writings. We regard these texts as *classics*, that is, works that have an abundance of meaning for us each time we open them. It is there that we will discover our particular meaning and mission. Our path of formation is especially guided by our *Fundamental Rule (the Triptych)*. The life of Montfort, as well as the lives of confreres throughout our history, influence and illumine our study and our inspiration. A look at Father de Montfort's way of life of and on his manner of being an apostolic worker furnishes us with a precious key to understanding his writings, and casts light on the pathways he personally used in his deep spiritual life and proposed to others.

42. To develop a distinctively Montfortian way of responding to the call to consecrated life, a candidate must receive from the start an adequate knowledge of both the consecrated life and the Montfortian life. Then he needs a period sufficient to allow him to test his suitability for this particular manifestation of God's grace, and also to experience living our own Montfortian style, marked by its specific spirituality and its ways of living religious life in community. When he grows in an ability to say "yes" without any reservation, in imitation of Mary and in the footsteps of Montfort, he devotes himself to follow Christ in order to be sent to evangelise with him and for him. In addition, he strives to strengthen his fidelity in apostolic life, being of one heart with his brothers, forming a community united around Jesus Christ, in the image of the apostles around Mary. This will make him an authentic witness of the Kingdom.

43. Our founder wanted us to be *gathered from among the nations* – "*Congrega nos de nationibus!*" (PM 18) – and *united by our Montfortian religious consecration*. His prayer has been answered. We belong to an international and multicultural congregation. Among us, formation is always placed within this perspective. It seeks to widen our horizons and to remind us that we belong not simply to the local entity of a province or delegation but to the congregation as a whole. Our openness to other cultures and to other languages is indispensable to our unity as an international apostolic community, and only this openness enables us to learn from one another.

44. To ensure a unified sense of belonging in the Company, basic formation will offer substantially the same content for all, priests and brothers. It is evident that the members of these two categories do not have to accomplish their part of the mission in the same manner; thus each one will be furnished with the specific elements he needs to effectively fulfil his role.

45. We belong as well to a larger Montfortian Family, which includes the Daughters of Wisdom, the Brothers of St. Gabriel, Secular Institutes and our Montfortian Associates. This large family comprises a diverse group with whom we share our own Montfortian heritage and with whom we can collaborate for certain aspects of formation.

46. Because our path is distinctively Montfortian, it is rooted in the real world, concerned with the formation of the whole person (integrating human development with spiritual growth, as well as intellectual and cultural learning), and has as its goal formation for apostolic action.

Formation Rooted in the Real World

47. The people among whom our mission calls us to live are greatly affected by the challenges, the anxieties, the deceptions and the hopes of the world of today. Our message is addressed to those who face the joys and burdens of everyday life. In this context, if we want to really be significant and credible, if we, like Montfort, want to respond to the "needs of the Church" (L 5), our formation must not be restricted to theological and spiritual disciplines. We need to understand developments in the social, cultural, political and economic world. We must grasp the range of issues which emerge around us. Our ongoing formation thus takes account of what is at stake in the present world and of the developments which arise in these domains. We need insight into the ways these developments affect the people we serve and the message we proclaim.

48. It is within this real world, with all its hopes and struggles, that we seek to become *liberos*,

free with the freedom of God (cf. PM 7); conformed to Christ – Wisdom Incarnate in Mary and the apostle of the Father; and capable of distinguishing true wisdom from false wisdom.

Formation of the Whole Person

Human Growth and Maturity – Liberos, Free with the Freedom of God

49. Human formation is a decisive factor in the life of religious and priests. The consecrated person is called to an interior freedom which allows him to weave together serene and loyal relationships with oneself, with others, and with God, which will enable him to understand the difficulties and problems of people and to elicit dialogue and collaboration with everyone.¹⁷ In fact, every being who wishes to be *human*, every believer, must seek to acquire this freedom. It is even more essential for someone who professes to reflect around himself the freely given love of God. From the beginning, and throughout life, the religious must acquire and nurture an authentic maturity, which will make one a profoundly human being, a balanced person, capable of really engaging himself in the mission, capable of loving with disinterest and of doing good for his neighbour (cf. PM 21).

50. Learning how to achieve a healthy balance in life is an important task of human development. The Montfortian who grows in an ability to care for his physical, psychological and spiritual health maintains a prudent stewardship of the gifts God has given him for the sake of others. Having time for work, study, prayer, leisure, and friends enables us to become fully alive and more authentic proclaimers of the Good News of Jesus Christ. “The conversion called for by our consecration enables us to become fully alive, and thus to give glory to God. ‘The glory of God is humanity fully alive, and the life of humanity is the vision of God’ (*Irenaeus of Lyon, Adversus Haereses*).”¹⁸

51. Care for one’s human growth will necessarily assume different characteristics as it follows the stages of life. The approach will be adapted to the stage in which the person finds himself.

52. Young people will first have to test their maturity, by discovering a full knowledge of themselves from the perspective of a free and responsible choice. For that they will have to be helped to discover their capacity for autonomy and their abilities and limits. It will be the same for their capacity to relate to and collaborate with others. A particular care will be given to their psychological and affective dimensions and their ability to be faithful in the long term.

53. As the Montfortian advances in years, he will continue to deepen these dimensions in light of new demands, in order to come to love with a truly free heart. He will have to be continually attentive to develop the virtues necessary for common life and the human qualities which will enable him to be a shining witness of the humanity of Christ.

54. It is necessary to learn from one’s youth the *art of growing old* following the guiding thread of the impassioned love of the Father and of our brothers. For us Montfortians, this is carried out in total consecration to Jesus through Mary. On the road of fidelity, particularly during moments of crisis, the confrere could find professional or specialised help, within the congregation or outside of it. But we must not forget the support and the inspiration he will find

¹⁷ Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 43.

¹⁸ *Open to Jesus Christ, Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom: Letter from the Capitulants*, Ariccia 1999, 39.

around him among his confreres. For example, an elder confrere, who has known how to advance in age in an exemplary way, who has known how to progress on the way of wisdom and freedom of spirit, who has learned from life how to place himself above certain events, who has learned to look even at the reality of death with a certain detachment, can, even without knowing it, communicate a great lesson in life to confreres and to the community.

Spiritual Growth – Conformed to Christ, Wisdom Incarnate in Mary and Apostle of the Father

55. All through his formation, the religious is on a spiritual journey enabling his “becoming more and more a disciple of Christ, growing in union with and in conformity to him. It is a matter of increasingly taking on the mind of Christ, of sharing more deeply his gift of himself to the Father and his service to his brothers and sisters of the human family.”¹⁹ Through a constant effort at conversion made in response to the action of the Holy Spirit, spiritual formation has the following aims:

- to make the daily renewal and living out of our Montfortian consecration a central aspect of our spiritual life
- to strengthen the experience of communion with God through deepening a sense of discipleship in ourselves (the *Sequela Christi*) and our intimacy with him who is Incarnate Wisdom, the one known, sought for and loved;²⁰
- to conform ourselves to the heart of Christ the Shepherd, Priest and Servant of the Father;
- to place ourselves at the service of Mary so as to be more perfectly at the service of Christ (C 34);²¹
- to become evermore “*Liberos*,” detached from everything, abandoned to Providence, ever ready to move quickly according to the inspiration of the Spirit (cf. PM 7-9);
- to prepare ourselves to seek Christ in our brothers and sisters with attention to and a love for the poorest, in authentic pastoral charity (cf. C 51c, 52);
- to bring about interior unity.

56. In the first stages of formation, the beginning candidate will have to be sure to acquire a Christian maturity flowing from an encounter with Christ and leading to a deeper response in faith expressed in a conscious living of his baptismal commitment. This is essential for him to be able to move to a personal and profound experience of the unique and all encompassing love of God by conforming himself to Christ chaste, poor, and obedient. Such a love will make him available to the Spirit in a paschal dynamic and will allow him to *be instructed* by the maternal care of Mary.

57. His entire adult life will be an effort to take on more deeply the mind of Christ, Priest, Prophet, and King. The constant process of conversion, of strengthening intimacy with Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom, this placing of oneself, like Mary, at Christ’s service (C34), will bring him into the dynamism of the Trinity, to “God alone.”

58. The solidity of the Montfortian’s spiritual formation will save him in difficult times. It will enable him to find, in the light of the Gospel and the inspiration of the charism, motivations for

¹⁹ The Teaching of the Church on Religious Life – Essential Elements, SCRIS, 1983, 45.

²⁰ Cf. The Montfortian Ratio Institutionis (1987), 67 a and b.

²¹ Ibid., 11.

his own choices. It will permit him to grasp more deeply the wisdom of the Cross. It will give him the courage to take up again the route to a new conversion, to “finding one’s first love.”²²

Intellectual and Cultural Formation – Capable of Discerning True Wisdom

59. We live in a world of many messages, many voices, many approaches to life, each claiming to be the key to wisdom. Intellectual and cultural formation develops our ability to think clearly and critically, so that we can have insight into these messages and their claims. A solid intellectual formation and a knowledge of cultures serve as important tools which, informed by faith and guided by God’s grace, can help us distinguish between true and false wisdom.

60. Intellectual formation is a response to the demands of the Incarnation in the complexity of modern life; it prepares us to cope with the challenge which the Church is bound to encounter in this era of *new evangelisation*. By our religious consecration, we are called to “Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet 3:15). We do this by proclaiming in a credible way the unchanging Gospel of Christ to people of today.²³ Philosophical and theological formation will look to the ongoing development of attitudes, talents and insights which assist in carrying out the mission of evangelisation which the Church has entrusted to the Company of Mary. We will seek to integrate these studies within a spiritual journey which will lead us to an intelligence of the heart.

61. An appreciation of the mystery of the Incarnation will make us always sensitive to the cultural context in which we evangelise and in which people live their faith. Consequently, we will be eager to understand the cultures in which we live and minister, so that we can preach the Gospel in ways that will be understood. We are called to respect the grace of God which is already at work in local cultures, and to discover how our spirituality can be inculturated in new times and places. At the same time, our attention to culture will lead us to critique aspects of the culture which need to be evangelised and transformed.

62. In our globalised world, it is easy to lose a critical sense. One can come to the point of no longer discerning good from evil; one can lose sight of the plan of God. The Montfortian needs to develop an appreciation of his own roots as well as an ability to maintain a certain freedom from them which makes possible a critical perspective. In this way he will develop the art of a healthy discernment, in order to come to love and choose in an enlightened way the true wisdom of Jesus Christ.

63. The Montfortian on mission will have to be attentive to the questions of contemporary people. Through study, enlightened by prayer and open to inculturation, he will do his utmost to acquire the attitudes and the competencies which will enable him to carry out well the mandate of evangelisation which the Church and the Congregation have given to him. Then he will be able to proclaim from the fullness of his heart (*ex abundantia cordis*) the love and the salvation of God in Jesus Christ (cf. RM 60).

Formation for a Life of Apostolic Action

²² Starting Afresh from Christ, 22.

²³ Cf. *Pastores dabo vobis*, 51.

64. Our pilgrimage of ongoing formation always has as its goal a fuller participation in the mission with which we have been entrusted. The apostolic dimension is a vital element of the Montfortian vocation (cf. C 6). Consequently, the whole of formation for apostolic life in our congregation is aimed at helping to form the *missionary* of the Company of Mary. We engage in a process of formation “in an apostolic spirit” (RM 12) throughout our life.

65. Congruent with the nature of the Congregation itself, Montfortian formation is “at the service of the mission” (C 7). The missionary dimension is therefore a predominant element in the process of formation as a whole, as well as in each of its aspects. Therefore, this approach to formation involves:

- developing one’s own personality “in the footsteps of the poor Apostles” (RM 2);
- deepening one’s personal experience of God while letting oneself be guided by Montfort;²⁴
- living religious life in observance of the evangelical counsels “so as to live in an apostolic way” (cf. C 77);²⁵
- growing in an attitude of availability and responsiveness to apostolic needs;
- cultivating a solid theological and spiritual formation, in order to be ready to “proclaim the love and the salvation of God in Jesus Christ” to people of our own day.²⁶

66. To be truly at the service of our mission, formation integrates in itself the four cumulative and necessarily linked elements of Montfortian mission – “Evangelisation, Mary, Availability and Acting Together” (S 7b). These essential aspects of our mission form the backdrop for our initial and ongoing formation.

67. Formation for apostolic life is not reducible to an apprenticeship in some pastoral technique. By encouraging growth in being conformed to the mind of Christ, apostle of the Father, it aims to develop an ever-deeper communion with his pastoral concern.

68. Following the example of our founder, the Montfortian will grow in love for the Church and in communion of thought with her.²⁷ He will do this by obeying with a full heart the authority of pastors (cf. RM 22), first of all the Holy Father, for whom Montfort had an unshakable veneration (cf. Hymn 147). It is to him that he went searching for his own mission, and it is to his bidding that he bound the mission of the Company of Mary (cf. RM 56).²⁸ The Montfortian will also be ready to be evangelised by the community of the faithful, above all the poorest, taking to heart their experience and concerns. In the midst of this community of faith, he will always look to pave the way for his proclamation of the Word by the witness of his affection for Jesus.

²⁴ Cf. *Montfortian Ratio Institutionis* (1987), 67a.

²⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 76b.

²⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 72.

²⁷ Cf. *Potissimum Institutioni*, 19

²⁸ Recall the Montfort’s journey to Rome in 1706. Hymn 147 could be the object of an entire reflection on the subject:

*Princes, religious,
the humble and great, young and old,
but glance at him
to know the way to heaven.* (H 147, 7)

69. The Montfortian is a missionary. From the beginning, the candidate must feel and cultivate within himself the desire to communicate Christ with zeal and passion. This desire will grow as he advances in knowledge of the life and the works of St. Louis-Marie and of the Montfortian tradition. Consequently, he will make his own the projects and the accomplishments of the Company, the local Church and his community. He will seek to attain the balance and the wisdom of the apostolic man, learning how to deal with the claims of missionary activity and the claims of apostolic community life.

70. The Montfortian will pay particular attention to periods of transition, especially the transition from initial formation to a life of apostolic activity and ongoing formation. In such moments, it is important for the confrere to count upon a guide or a counsellor who can help him deal with the impact of the change in his situation and keep alive the desire to renew himself.

71. We are on the path of formation for apostolic life at different stages of life. Our sharing together across different generations adds richness and depth to our life and mission. Permanently professed confreres in ongoing formation can share with younger confreres their life experience, their wisdom, their experience of living Montfortian spirituality, and their ways of participating in the Montfortian mission. Confreres in initial formation can bring their enthusiasm, new insights and energy. In return, they must appropriate the history which has gone before them and learn a sense of faithfulness over time. Our sharing with one another constitutes an essential and dynamic aspect of apostolic community life.

72. At every age, and independently of the divers phases of life, critical situations can present themselves. These situations can be provoked by external factors (a change of community or activity, apostolic difficulties or lack of success, misunderstanding, marginalisation, and – for certain individuals – the end of mandates in which one has been in authority, etc.). These situations can also be caused by factors which are more strictly personal (physical or psychological illness, strong temptations, a crisis of faith or identity, conflicts, feeling insignificant, etc.). Following Montfort, the confrere put to the test in this way can come to the point of welcoming this purification and loss as an essential act of following the crucified Christ, and indeed as a constitutive part of his apostolate. One can see in such an experience an instrument of formation in the hands of the Father; one can see in it a struggle which is not only psychological, but also spiritual, marked each day by the presence of God and the power of the cross.

When fidelity becomes difficult, we must offer the person the support of an increased trust and a more deeply felt friendship. The sympathetic availability of the superior is necessary above all. The help of a qualified confrere can also provide a great comfort.

Ongoing Formation: A Path to Walk each Day

73. The only way we can make this pilgrimage is by moving out from where we are to where we wish to go. Ongoing formation commits us to move and to act. We need more than good intentions; we need to put ourselves on the road and concretely risk taking some steps. Our task will always include reading, praying, reflecting, listening, learning, practising new pastoral approaches...

“Traveller, what do you see?” And where do you want to go? Guided by this icon of the disciple of Montfort, attentive to the real needs of the world, and conscious that our Montfortian life itself must be a sign, we see in our ongoing formation a road on which we are ceaselessly ready to commit ourselves and to walk.

SECOND PART

WALKING THE PATH

THE PROCESS OF OUR FORMATION

*I am in labour again with the children of God
until Jesus Christ my Son
is formed in them to the fullness of his age.
(TD 33)*

74. It is important always to remember that the process of initial formation is governed by the reality of ongoing formation. The significance of this perspective cannot be underestimated. Ongoing formation is not simply what comes after initial formation, but it is that which precedes it and makes it possible, it is the generative idea or the creative womb which keeps it and gives it its identity.

75. Neither is ongoing formation a periodic event which occurs only when one takes a sabbatical or enrolls in occasional programs for updating. Rather, ongoing formation is the daily process of being shaped as a Montfort Missionary, the daily journey of conversion which is inherent in our religious and Montfortian consecration. Consequently, formation is not simply the concern of those who accompany new members in the initial stages of the process of entering the congregation. Formation is not simply a matter for novice masters and other formators. Formation is the continual concern of every confrere. Each one of us is called to walk the path of ongoing formation each day.

76. This perspective also has implications for the way we look at initial formation. In addition to consisting of the first and important steps in the journey to permanent commitment, initial formation (pre-novitiate, novitiate, and post-novitiate) is also the period in which one develops the skills to enter into a process of life-long learning and ongoing formation.

77. In order to get our bearings on the journey of ongoing formation, in Part I we have looked at Montfort's example of apostolic energy; we have gazed upon the icon of the Montfortian apostle today; and we have examined some of the aspects of the path of Montfortian formation. This second part discusses significant concerns in the process of formation with specific attention to some practices we engage in as we walk that path. The specific norms for stages in the process of initial and ongoing formation will be discussed in the second volume of this Ratio.

78. Formation is like walking: it requires energy, effort and coordination. It is an activity that is part of our daily lives. Formation is not simply something we think about; it is something we do. Thus it involves practice and practices.

79. Practices are the fruit of action and energy exerted over time. Repeated every day, our familiar activities become second nature to us, a part of who we are. During our formation we adopt certain behaviours and we engage in certain patterns. If we truly want them to have an impact on us, these practices of formation and transformation have to engage us in the depth of our being. Even if they entail an exterior aspect, they ultimately aim at the interior transformation of the entire person.

80. What follows is not an exhaustive description of everything we do on the journey of ongoing formation. To attempt such a description would not respect the particular ways each of us walk the path, depending upon our unique gifts, abilities, challenges and the particular circumstances of our life. Rather, what is described are certain ways of being that become common activities we share as we walk together in the footsteps of the poor apostles.

81. We start each day as a new beginning in Christ (Chapter 4). Therefore, we learn ways of discernment and apostolic zeal by walking in the school of Montfort who is our witness and guide (Chapter 5). We become apostles of Jesus Christ by allowing ourselves to be formed in Mary, just as the Word was made flesh within her (Chapter 6).

Chapter 4

STARTING AFRESH FROM CHRIST, OUR LORD AND MASTER

*Jesus, our Saviour, true God and true man
must be the ultimate end of all our other devotions;
otherwise they would be false and misleading.*

*He is the Alpha and Omega,
the beginning and the end of everything.*

(TD 61)

82. Faithful to his promise (Mt 28:20), the Risen Jesus is with us and sends us his Spirit to enlighten our minds and inflame our hearts (cf. Lk 24:13-35). We “**let [our]selves be formed every day of [our] lives.**”²⁹: that is the response the Lord expects of us in return for the gift of his grace (cf. 2 Cor 5:20). For us Montfortians, that means we allow ourselves to be educated to *fidelity to a vocation* which has common characteristics, and in which each one realizes his particular mission. How does one become faithful? – It is by starting afresh from Christ every day; it is in returning in a new way to our “first love,” where one experiences the fidelity of God, where one finds “the inspiring spark which first gave rise to the following.”³⁰

“To know Jesus Christ Incarnate Wisdom, is to know all we need. To presume to know everything and not to know him is to know nothing at all” (LEW 11).

What are the practices which can assist us on our path of knowing Jesus as we start afresh with him each day? They include those actions which elicit in us fidelity to life in the Spirit, fidelity to our mission, fidelity to our consecration in an apostolic community, and fidelity to the calls of a changing world. All of these practices draw us in to a deeper knowledge of Jesus and a closer relationship with him.

Fidelity to Life in the Spirit

83. **By listening to the Word of God.** – The open book of Scripture, read and meditated upon, in an atmosphere of prayerful dialogue with God, sets before us a world in which we encounter God’s promises and the fulfilment of those promises in Jesus. Since ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Jesus, we come to a deeper knowledge of Jesus by pondering the text of the Word of God.

84. The Scriptures become our ongoing guidebook. By listening to the Word of God, we discover new paths of conversion. “Indeed, the word of God is living and effective, penetrating between even soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of

²⁹ *Vita Consecrata*, 69.

³⁰ *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 22.

the heart. No creature is concealed from him, but everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must render an account” (Heb 4:12-13).

85. Father de Montfort was always captivated by reading and contemplating the Word of God.³¹ Fidelity to our vocation is inconceivable without a renewed listening to the Word. “It is particularly necessary that listening to the Word become a vital encounter... which allows one to draw from the biblical text the living word which calls, which orients, which shapes one’s existence.”³² “It is there, in fact, where the Master reveals himself and educates the mind and the heart. It is there that the vision of faith matures, learning to look at reality and events through the eyes of God, to the point of having ‘the mind of Christ’ (1Cor 2:16).”³³

86. Listening to the Word of God also has an *ecclesial dimension*. Fraternal life in community favours the rediscovery of such a dimension: in order to do that we must, “receive [the Word], meditate upon it, live it together, communicate the experiences which blossom from it and thus submit yourself to an authentic spirituality of communion (...). Nourished by the Word... consecrated men and women can be authentic *servants of the Word* in the task of evangelisation. This is how they carry out a priority for the Church at the beginning of the new millennium.”³⁴

87. By engaging in patterns of prayer and contemplation. – The extraordinary missionary vocation of Montfort was born of contemplation and from there it was regenerated ceaselessly, in intense and prolonged moments of friendship, in intimate relationship, in communion with Christ: Montfort lived the mystical experience of *being with the Lord*.³⁵ Our vocation must also continually mature in this friendship with Christ: we must “become like Montfort contemplatives in action.”³⁶

88. The Holy Father reminds religious, “Your first task therefore cannot not be in the line of *contemplation*. Every reality of consecrated life is born and is regenerated each day in the unending contemplation of the face of Christ.”³⁷ An authentic and fruitful spiritual life requires that everyone, in various works and ministries, “regularly dedicate, every day, appropriate times to enter deeply into silent conversation with him by whom they know they are loved, to share their very lives with him and to receive enlightenment to continue on the daily journey (...). At times fidelity to personal and liturgical prayer will require *a true effort* not to allow oneself to be swallowed up in frenetic activism. Otherwise it will be impossible to bear fruit: *No more than a branch can bear fruit of itself apart from the vine, can you bear fruit apart from me* (Jn 15:4).”³⁸

89. Our life in the Spirit is deepened as we develop patterns of personal and communal prayer. The dynamic interaction between our experiences of personal prayer and the communal prayer we share with our confreres helps us to remain faithful to our relationship with God over the years. To this end we take seriously the recommendations which our Constitutions make regarding the apostolic prayer of Montfort Missionaries (C 116-130).

³¹ Cf. Fr. Gérard Lemire, *Montfortian prayer and availability in the service of the Church*, S.G. 9/1986.

³² *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 39.

³³ *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 24.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Cf. among others H 24:37-39 – The saint practices the presence of God.

³⁶ Cf. Fr. Gérard Lemire, *Montfortian prayer and availability in the service of the Church*, S.G. 9/1986.

³⁷ John Paul II, Homily of February 2, 2001, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, February 4, 2001.

³⁸ *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 25.

90. We seek whatever means will assist us in a life of prayer that is constant, faithful, and mature. The accompaniment given by a spiritual director can be helpful in this regard. Periodic days of prayer and annual retreats will also help us nourish our relationship with God.

91. **By centring ourselves in the action of the Eucharist.** – With the whole Church, the Eucharist is for us Montfortians the source from which our power flows and the summit toward which all our activity tends. The Eucharist acts as our ongoing formation in the paschal mystery. Through our participation in the celebration of this mystery of faith, we unite ourselves with the dying and the rising of Jesus. It is from the table of the Word and the table of the Eucharist that we draw our life.³⁹

92. This “memorial of the Lord’s sacrifice, the heart of the life of the Church and of every community, fashions from within the renewed offering of one’s very existence, the project of community life and the apostolic mission.”⁴⁰ In the Eucharist, the Lord Jesus joins us to his own paschal offering to the Father:⁴¹ we offer ourselves and we are offered. Religious consecration takes on a Eucharistic structure of total offering of oneself, closely associated with the mystery of Christ. Around the table of the Eucharist, the entire community renews itself each day.

93. Montfort sang about the Eucharist as the mystery of the total gift of Jesus:

“It is there that he is made everything for all
So loving is he;
There he is our dear spouse,
Our true God,
Our sweet master and doctor,
Our friend, our brother,
Our way and our road,
Our sweet light” (Hymn 129:5).

94. He does not tire in presenting to us the Blessed Sacrament as

“... a good school
to learn in a short time,
without craft and without words,
knowledge of virtues,
divine wisdom” (Hymn 130:1).

95. The celebration of the Eucharist is a daily missioning by which we are sent out to become what we have received and to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. Our union with Christ and one another in the Eucharist also unites us with the concerns of all people, for “the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated *on the altar of the world.*”⁴²

96. **By living the love of Christ.** – To be men of God means to be consecrated to the double commandment of love – love of God and love of neighbour:

³⁹ Cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 1.

⁴⁰ Starting Afresh from Christ, 26.

⁴¹ Cf. Montfort, Hymns on the Eucharist.

⁴² *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 8.

“When love is visible,
sincere, and from the depths of the heart,
it is the infallible mark
of love for the Creator.
One without the other is impossible,
whoever denies it is a liar” (Hymn 148:3).

97. It goes without saying that, for the disciples of Montfort to be men of God is to be faithful to our vocation and submit ourselves to charity, the “queen” of our life (RM 45). It is through the love of neighbour, and particularly our love for the poor (RM 47), that we open up to Jesus Christ and meet him in new ways. Montfort urges us to love as none other, God hidden in our neighbour (Hymn 148).

98. It is through our participation in the self-emptying love which Christ showed in his life and death that our relationship with him bears fruit.

99. **By renewing each day our consecration to Jesus at the hands of Mary.** – All of the practices through which we come to know and love Jesus Christ, Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom, are symbolized in the act of true devotion which is our Montfortian consecration. This practice of daily renewal and dedication is of central significance for us, and it is more fully treated in the following chapter.

Fidelity to the Mission

100. **By proclaiming Christ in ways that provoke a response.** – This is the first duty of the Montfortian mission, and we accept it with enthusiasm: “Our mission in the Church consists in revealing the mystery of salvation to those who do not yet know it, and in helping those who have already heard the Good News to rediscover and deepen this mystery by a renewed consciousness of the meaning of their baptismal commitment” (C 9). “This mission is still in its beginning stages and we must commit ourselves with all our resources to bring it about. The confident and mutually dependant action of missionaries must always seek better ways of responding to the demands of inculturation in such a way that the specific values of each people are not rejected but purified and brought to their fullness.”⁴³

101. For us Montfortians, inculturation means *learning to be close* to the people to whom we are sent. It is, moreover, a requirement of all evangelisation. “Priests and brothers together, our impact on the world comes about by the witness of the whole of our life. It is a continual invitation to incarnate the message in the various cultures with which we come into contact. To be genuine, evangelisation calls us to be present among the poor, and, as far as this is possible, to live like them, in an effort to show solidarity with them.”⁴⁴

102. **By maintaining an itinerancy which seeks the will of God.** – Educating oneself for mission, allowing oneself to be formed by it, means to consider the mission as a criterion of discernment in our personal and communal choices. The Chapter of 1993 gave us a reminder that will always be pertinent: “When choices have to be made, or when we fix our options, both in the old entities and in the newer entities, it is vital for us to be sure that our decisions are

⁴³ Starting Afresh from Christ, 37.

⁴⁴ Capitular document of 1993: Montfortian Mission, 20.

based on the spirit of Montfort, and to pray to him for the courage to leave a place when our work is done, to set to work wherever the Gospel is not, or is no longer, preached, or to keep going wherever there is still a real task of evangelisation to be done.”⁴⁵ This will give to our life and our apostolic activities a freedom and an availability which will make the Montfortian an authentic itinerant missionary.

103. Fr. William Considine uses the image “going out from Jerusalem” to describe this itinerancy: “This is a metaphor for a certain itinerant life-style, a certain going forth on pilgrimage that lies at the heart of our Montfortian existence. It is the *désinstallation* or availability, the *instabiles sumus* – not having a permanent home, not remaining focussed inward, but always going out toward... It certainly entails concrete choices and consequences. But it is also a matter of the heart, a state of true spiritual poverty and dependence on Providence. Thus there are so many Cenacles, so many Jerusalems to leave behind. This is true for younger and older confreres. Through a lifetime of learning to become physically and spiritually itinerant, thus a lifetime close to other pilgrims and those on the margins, we are ready to enter the heavenly Jerusalem.”⁴⁶

104. **By working together.** – The Holy Spirit gathers us and unites us in a community for a mission: “This apostolic community is called to continually reform itself according to the current needs and situations. Its members gather together to become aware of the reality of the life of people and of the Church, to listen to the Word of God and to make their mission the object of their common prayer, to be inspired by Montfort, to let themselves be challenged and guided by directives coming from the Church; all of this provides the opportunity to develop a common project for their life and work. In this way, the apostolic community becomes for each and every member a place of conversion and of continuing nourishment.”⁴⁷ Montfortian *working together* becomes every day “a call to sharing, to solidarity, to the availability required by the mission.”⁴⁸

105. To this end, our ongoing formation seeks to develop continually our skills of communication and team building for the sake of the mission, so that the way we work together to proclaim the Gospel will itself be a model of the message that we speak..

106. **By integrating into our apostolate the rich Marian heritage of our congregation.** – The “Marian character of the Company is *an essential possession* of our Congregation and Mary is not present in the life of the missionaries in some accidental fashion: devotion toward her is *an integral part of their spiritual life and apostolate*” (C 39). “The ‘*perfect consecration*’ to Jesus through Mary is the most outstanding mark of the Marian character of our inspiration” (C 40) and of our mission. Montfort shows us that Mary is the greatest means for obtaining and preserving Divine Wisdom (LEW 203), who is the answer to all human desire (TD 61). “Whether we speak of evangelisation or of the “new evangelisation” to which John Paul II calls us, it is our task to highlight clearly the role of Mary in the establishment of the reign of Christ, the Wisdom of God given to the men and women he came to liberate.”⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁶ Fr. William Considine, Montfortian Apostolic Community, S.G. 01/1996, 25.

⁴⁷ Capitular document of 1993: Montfortian Mission, 16.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 23.

Fidelity to our Consecration in an Apostolic Community

107. “In order to live ‘*as free men,*’ ‘*in the manner of the apostles,*’ we consecrate ourselves to the Lord by vows for the service of the Kingdom” (C 77). Experience teaches us that this response to a call is not made once and for all: it is really in the *commitment renewed each day* that we live our religious consecration.

108. **By Trusting God’s Providence through our Apostolic Poverty.** – Montfort wanted to see us live our *apostolic poverty* above all *before God*, by placing our confidence in God alone (LCM 4) and by giving ourselves totally and freely to the work of salvation (RM 5-6). This confidence expressed itself in a *prayer* charged with contemplation and gratitude, in a spirit of solidarity and poverty. By consecration to Christ through Mary, we are taught total availability and closeness to those whom we evangelise – above all by placing ourselves in the midst of the poorest (RM 7) – and by sharing their suffering, their hopes and their destiny. In fact, apostolic poverty is *living trust in Providence* by being dependant upon people. *In community* – the word says it – means to place everything in common, not to dispose of or use material possessions without the permission of superiors, and of course, that means a moderate use of possessions on the personal as well as the communal level.

109. **By Living in the Freedom of Apostolic Obedience.** – Montfort prayed to obtain a community of missionaries free with the freedom of God, people who would not be held down by individual projects, but ready to fly wherever the breath of the Spirit blows them, ready to obey the call of superiors (PM 7-10). Such a community is thus founded on *apostolic obedience*. This expresses itself by an availability to all the calls which we can recognize in truth by means of *discernment* and *reflection* carried out *in community* in order to discover together the will of God and to make it our own. Obedience is lived to the very end as a *sign of love and as a source of apostolic effectiveness*; it requires us to make ourselves available, to build up the Body of Christ, with our best energies of intelligence and will, with the most valuable gifts we have received from nature and grace (cf. 1 Pet 4:10-11).

110. This path of configuring oneself to the will of God as the one reason to live carries in itself *crucifying self-denial*, which leads us to what is essential and frees our ability to serve the Kingdom of God. Obedience will be lived in a spirit of welcome and participation. We should learn to express our hopes and our personal point of view in the context of a search for the will of God, and, when the superiors make a decision, we should be ready to recognize in it this will. The vow of obedience is always more stimulating when one sees in it a way to be loved and to be guided by *fidelity to the common good*, by the accomplishment of a *community project*, and by the *mission which the Church has confided to the congregation*. The superiors have the right to expect that each one takes his responsibilities seriously and is faithful to his commitments, that he makes his own in faith the decisions made, in which he allows himself to be instructed by the Wisdom of the Cross, which teaches him to be faithful even at the cost of sacrifice.

111. **By Living Chastity for the Sake of the Kingdom.** – By the vow of chastity, we consecrate to Christ all our capacity to love and all our energies in order to proclaim the Kingdom. By uniting ourselves in Christ, we share in his love for the poorest and the most disinherited, even to the gift of ourselves. Chastity is at the same time a *grace* and an *offering*; it is a gift which we must care for each day if we really want to liberate in us a true and faithful love. Our heart learns to be chaste above all by an encounter with the Lord, who offers us his friendship, by

suitable asceticism and by repeated challenging decisions. Without presuming our own power, we remain vigilant, using the natural means which facilitate self-mastery. In order to remain faithful, we have at our disposal our union with Christ and Mary, the sacraments, and a welcoming community life, in which we develop an atmosphere of cordiality and of joyful simplicity.

112. By allowing common life and corporate mission to make a claim on us. – The community is the “*God-enlightened space*”⁵⁰ of Montfortian formation, a place where the Kingdom is visible. By living and celebrating the paschal mystery, the community becomes a witness of communion and a prophetic sign of fraternity in a divided and wounded society which is searching for meaning in life. In the community, this spirituality of communion is born and develops, a spirituality of communion indispensable for establishing dialogue in charity which today’s world needs so much:⁵¹ “You must be joined together in a close union of mind and heart” (FC 2).

113. Indeed, we are gathered together for the mission (cf. PM 3, RM 2); we are united in order to be sent! We are then *a company* (PM 30) whose first task is the establishment and the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. Just as Eternal Wisdom undertook and accomplished his mission by an *excess of love* (LEW 64), so also *our mission springs up from the power of communion*, the gift of God, *poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit* (Rom 5:5). On the other hand, the communion which exists among us is a force, *a source of renewal*, by sharing the joys and the fatigue of the apostolic life (cf. Mk 6:30-31, RM 35). *In company with Mary*, our communion leads to mission and mission leads to communion... Consequently, *we share in a real way the joys and suffering of those whom God has placed beside us*: “Their charity to one another will be full of attention and good will, and they will look for opportunities to do one another a good turn. It will be marked by mutual respect which brings them to give precedence to others and by patience which will enable them to bear with one another’s faults” (RM 44).

114. This sense of sharing has some concrete implications, as Montfort tells us when he speaks of “the *common purse* so that it may be used (among other things) for the needs of the whole community” (RM 17). This communion is expressed in a **solidarity** as much on the local level as on an international level. Certain practices allow us to *incarnate in real life our being together* and to promote its flourishing. For example: a common project, discernment in light of the Word of God and the signs of the times, an effective presence of the superior of the community, encouraging sharing, creating occasions for gathering together and for common prayer, a real partnership with lay people in our projects... We also see that Montfort wants us to avoid a certain style of community life which seeks to create a comfortable nest and thus can be harmful to the mission. According to his thought, we are reunited for the mission and by the mission. There will always be a healthy tension between community life and apostolic life.⁵²

115. From this perspective, the Capitular Document of 1999 gives several considerations regarding the quality of our community life: it must not suffocate the mission but serve it (be together in order to do something together). It seeks a form of communion which itself will be evangelical, and calls for an involvement that goes beyond simply living under the same roof.

⁵⁰ *Vita Consecrata*, 42.

⁵¹ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 51.

⁵² For this and the preceding paragraphs, cf. the Capitular Document of 1999, Open to Jesus Christ, 20-24

For those who live alone it must promote a real communion with others.⁵³

Fidelity to the calls of a changing world

116. **By listening to the signs of the times.** – The striking plea of the 1993 General Chapter Document to be *open to the signs of the times* still resonates today as an invitation to learn how to listen and discern the various signs which come from *the congregation, the Church, and the world*.⁵⁴ The world today is changing very rapidly, as Fr. Lemire recalled in an analysis which is still valid,⁵⁵ and thus we must be aware and vigilant. Discernment and vigilance are authentic if they are accompanied by *apostolic prayer* and give rise to *prophetic and creative action*, as the capitular text concludes: “Faced with this situation and the attempts made, we have searched for light and for the courage of our Founder. Our desire to respond to this situation becomes a prayer: *I cannot stop, seeing the needs of the Church, asking continuously and with sighs for a little company of good priests* (L 5).”⁵⁶

117. Allowing ourselves to be formed by Christ to this kind of listening signifies definitively that we *adjust our lives to expand to the horizons* which he opens to us. Our response to the missionary vocation must not limit itself to living in the Church and for the Church. The last chapter of *Vita Consecrata* invites all religious and congregations to extend themselves with Christ to other Christian churches, to other religions, to all those who do not profess any religious conviction.⁵⁷ As Montfortians, we are called to offer our specific contribution in all the great dialogues to which Vatican II opened the entire Church. The *conversion to dialogue* disposes us to welcome important values for our life and our own mission; it makes our witnessing a proclamation of the hope which is within us.

Jesus Christ, our Starting Point, our Goal and our Companion on the Way

118. The path of ongoing formation is one we travel each day. We receive each day as a gift from God and as an opportunity to become a more perfect disciple of Jesus Christ. We start afresh from Christ and we respond to the invitations to conversion which come our way. Our journey with Christ enables us to know him and to help others to know him (cf. LEW 93-95). It is Christ’s presence with us and his promise of life which lead us on and make the journey possible.

“In [Jesus Christ] alone dwells the entire fullness of the divinity and the complete fullness of grace, virtue and perfection. In him alone we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing; he is the only teacher from whom we must learn; the only Lord on whom we should depend; the only Head to whom we should be united and the only model that we should imitate. He is the only Physician that can heal us; the only Shepherd that can feed us; the only Way that can lead us; the only Truth that we can believe; the only Life that can animate us. He alone is everything to us and he alone can satisfy all our desires” (TD 61).

⁵³ Ibid., 24.

⁵⁴ Capitular document of 1993: Montfortian Mission, 4-12.

⁵⁵ Cf. Fr. Gérard Lemire, The present needs of formation, S.G. 04/1989.

⁵⁶ Capitular document of 1993: Montfortian Mission, 12.

⁵⁷ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 100.

Chapter 5

IN THE SCHOOL OF SAINT LOUIS-MARIE DE MONTFORT WITNESS AND GUIDE

*Here is a secret which the Most High taught me
and which I have not found in any book ancient or modern.
Inspired by the Holy Spirit, I am confiding it to you.
(SM 1)*

The Style of our Founder

119. It is by being inspired by the missionary style proper to Montfort that we can become who we are. As we have already said, our family portrait presents us with common traits which have made so many of our confreres authentic disciples of Montfort. The lifestyle of our founder is marked by his interior freedom (PM 7-8) and his abandonment to Providence, which kept him always open to the promptings of the Spirit (PM 9), in obedience to authority (PM 10, RM 19-27).

120. **Know how to take risks for God:** that is how one can summarize another characteristic of Montfortian style. In our changing world, with all the developments which we have lived in the congregation, it becomes urgent to cultivate in ourselves the *boldness* of Montfort in order to be faithful to our missionary call. His life confronts us today more than ever – at a personal and communal level – with the same challenge which he gave one day to Marie-Louise of Jesus and Catherine Brunet (cf. L 27): risk something for God. “Like her, are we ready to *take risks for God?* We will be able to take risks and do new things if, together, we turn in faith towards Jesus who is still today Wisdom incarnate in Mary.”⁵⁸

121. **The evangelical radicalism** of Montfort enabled him to develop his *passion for the Kingdom* and his bold creativity. The response he gives to his friend Blain during their famous meeting invites us to walk in the same direction. M. Blain recounts how he began by easing himself of what he had in his heart by repeating what he had heard said about the eccentricities and the behaviour of his strange friend. How did he hope to attract other ecclesiastics to join him in his apostolic works unless he was willing to modulate the rigour of his life-style? For every response St. Louis-Marie showed him his New Testament: his sole desire was to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ and his apostles. If God wanted him to be associated with other ecclesiastics in this type of life, he would be delighted, but that depended on God... and not on him. Then he added that there are: “different kinds of wisdom; that the wisdom of a person living in community is one thing, the wisdom of a missionary and an apostolic man quite another; that the former had nothing new to undertake, and nothing to do but to let himself be guided by the rule and the customs of a well-regulated house;... the former lived a hidden life in peace because he undertook nothing new; whereas the latter, having continually to fight the

⁵⁸ Capitular document of 1993: Montfortian Mission, 24.

world, the devil, and sin,... had to execute new designs... ; that in a word, if wisdom consisted in doing nothing new for God, in undertaking nothing for his glory, for fear of being spoken about, then the Apostles were wrong in leaving Jerusalem; they should have remained shut up in the Cenacle; St. Paul should not have made so many journeys, or St. Peter have attempted to plant the cross upon the Capitol... ”⁵⁹

122. In the end, his ardent charity and his imitation of the poor apostles placed Montfort in contact with society, among ordinary people, particularly *among the poor*. They incited him to use simple means, among which one finds, in the first place, the language of the cross “a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1Cor 1:23).

In the Footsteps of a Master

123. Montfort is at the same time a founder and a spiritual master. If the spiritual way which he proposes is addressed to all, it is clear that those who want to walk in his footsteps in his Company of Mary are the first ones invited to enter into that way, all the more since he invites us to teach it to others (cf. RM 60). He proposes to us an itinerary to seek Wisdom⁶⁰ and four preferred means to arrive at the end. These are the ones which have formed St. Louis-Marie. In them he give us particular colours and traits. He invites us to appropriate them, to let them seep into us, to the point that we ourselves become, in a harmoniously integrated way, living exemplars of the *Montfortian icon*.

A Path of Missionary Wisdom

124. Montfortian spirituality is essentially *missionary*. Its pathway opens onto the apostolate, which is the *perfection* of it: “divine Wisdom lists three degrees in holy living, the last of which constitutes perfection: 1) Listen to God with humble submission; 2) Act in him and through him with persevering fidelity; 3) Finally, seek to acquire the light and unction you need *to inspire others* with the love for Wisdom which will lead them to eternal life” (LEW, 30).

125. If Montfortian wisdom is a school of goodness (cf. LEW 5), its fullness is the apostolate: “Blessed are those who understand these eternal truths. Still more blessed are those who believe them. Most blessed of all are those who believe them, put them into practice and *teach them to others*; for they will shine in heaven like stars for all eternity” (LEW 153). Contemplation and action are the two lungs which make possible the breathing of the “Montfortian-being”: *to know and savour* the truth (contemplation) and *to get others to savour it* (action) (cf. RM 60). In the apostolate, we can only give what we have received in contemplation. For Father de Montfort, the spiritual man and the apostolic man are one.

126. The point of departure for this itinerary is *knowledge* (intelligence and listening), but not a knowledge which would only be speculative (cf. LEW 58, 174; TD 64). Certainly it enlightens the spirit, but it also touches the heart (cf. LEW 94). It is a *loving knowledge*: to know *in order to love* (cf. LEW 8).

⁵⁹ J.-B. Blain (335-337), cited by Fr. William Considine, Montfortian Apostolic Community. S.G. 01/1996, 21.

⁶⁰ Montfort considered obtaining this Wisdom so important that he asked the Penitents who make their pilgrimage to Saumur “to obtain from God through Mary’s intercession good missionaries” and to pray for this intention; cf. The Rules, 3.1 (*God Alone*, pp. 495-96).

127. This knowledge is an experiential science of truth which is to be tasted: a truth which we must savour, which we must experience within ourselves (cf. FC 45). It moves from the intelligence (spirit) to the heart (to savour), but it does not remain there because it is a practical knowledge (cf. SR 1). What is known and savoured must also be practised; it is an active wisdom at work (cf. LEW 94). From the eyes (to know) to the heart (to savour and love), one must arrive at the hands (to practice). It is then, and only then, that what has been known, savoured and practised will be proclaimed (by the mouth) (cf. SR 1). In the first method for reciting the rosary, at the thirteenth decade, Father de Montfort asks for the gift of Wisdom “that we may know, taste and practice your truth and share it with everyone.”⁶¹ We can only preach what we have tasted and practised (cf. Acts 1:1; 1 John 1:1-3; SR 2; RM 62).

128. For Montfort, the apostolic man is symphonic: he can only make himself heard in the harmony of his different dimensions. Formation to this missionary wisdom is an integration of all the dimensions of the human person, in tune with the Truth.

Four Montfortian Means of Growing

129. *The Love of Eternal Wisdom* gives us four means to acquire wisdom: an ardent desire (LEW 181-183), continuous prayer (LEW 184-193), universal mortification (LEW 194-202) and a loving and true devotion to the Blessed Virgin (LEW 203-227). They also constitute privileged means to help us form ourselves in the school of Father de Montfort.

Desire

130. Attention to our desires ought to be the point of departure for all Montfortian discernment. To discern is first of all to be aware of the desires which dwell in us. It was a true vocational discernment, in the broad sense of the term, which Montfort addressed to his spiritual director, Monsieur Leschassier, if one considers Montfort’s Letter 5, which is often cited. After recounting his disappointments (which he found did not correspond to his expectations and inclinations), he lays out a list of feelings, intuitions, inclinations and desires which he feels within himself. It is in this examination of his consciousness, his experience of truth within himself, that he took stock of his particular vocation, of his charism as missionary and founder.

131. Then, in a second moment, he places his desires, “good and persistent thought they may be,” at a distance, “rejects” them by placing himself in this state of “indifference,” which is indispensable for welcoming the will of God (cf. L 5,6). This is an interior freedom in face of the possibility of the realisation or the non-realisation of the desire. Finally, before making his decision, he compares his desires with those of others: his spiritual director, people placed on his path (Madame de Montespan, the Bishop of Poitiers, the poor of Poitiers) (cf. L 6.9.11). Because our desires must be purified: we have “countless desires, or rather would-be desires” (LEW 182), they can appear to be authentic without being really so. One can believe that one is not lying while lying nonetheless (cf. LEW 199). Who knows what share of lying and disguise is hidden under the appearance of truth, under beautiful pretexts (cf. LEW 13; TD 90 ff.)? It is to this discernment that Montfort invites us by choosing true wisdom (cf. LEW 74-83): a really difficult and fragile discernment, since “even those who are wisest in the sight of God are often deceived” (LEW 79).

⁶¹ God Alone, p. 236.

Prayer

132. To desire is to pray already... Prayer gives words to desire. Founding itself on faith animated by charity (cf. LEW 185-187; SR 35, 142-144), prayer sustains desire through the trial of time. To persevere in prayer is to enter into faithful endurance, an essential aspect of formation. It involves giving oneself time, giving time to God. The process of formation needs time...

133. *Perseverance, the first quality of Montfortian prayer* (cf. LEW 188-190; SR 145-148), is this time of maturation throughout which the heart opens itself and expands to make room for the action of God, who is infinitely patient with our human rhythms. As members of the Company of Mary, we are the fruit of St. Louis-Marie's persevering prayer. In 1700, did he not plead "continually for a small and poor band" (cf. L 5)? After more than thirteen years this tireless prayer was enkindled into a flame, the ember of desire became a deluge of fire (PM 16-17)... . How many voyages, pilgrimages, steps did he take in order to accompany his ceaseless prayer? It is because he knew that he must abandon himself to God as if everything depended upon him and nevertheless do everything as if he expected nothing from him (cf. RW 29; LS, p. 193). He prayed and worked all his life without having the good fortune of knowing that his prayer was heard. This was the ultimate stripping, the ultimate renouncing of a desire he carried for such a long time, the ultimate act of abandonment and of confidence, the ultimate silence of God... To become what we are is to become this Word of God's response which has been awaited for so long...

134. In the school of Father de Montfort, *the prayer par excellence is the rosary*: "To vocal prayer we must add mental prayer, which enlightens the mind, inflames the heart and disposes the soul to listen to the voice of Wisdom, to savour her delights and possess her treasures. For myself, I know of no better way of establishing the kingdom of God, Eternal Wisdom, than to unite vocal and mental prayer by saying the holy Rosary and meditating on its fifteen mysteries" (LEW 193; SR 9). The rosary is really the school of prayer *à la Montfort*. One learns there how to "pray well" (SR 116 ff.) with attention and devotion (cf. SR 120).⁶²

135. Attention means more than being attentive to that which is said and done in prayer (cf. SR 119); it is being aware of presence. It is above all to place oneself in the presence of God, to realise that God is there, making himself present, as Father de Montfort says (SR 120). It also involves being present to what we are doing in the totality of our being: to be there, completely, in his presence. It means being aware of the Person with whom we are speaking, with whom we are entering into relationship. It means never losing the present, never losing the Presence.

136. Devotion is the loving and tender bond which unites us affectively and effectively with the Lord and the Virgin Mary, with their presence in our heart. The rosary teaches us that to meditate is to gaze at, to contemplate Jesus and Mary, to paint an interior icon of the mystery which opens itself to us and is illuminated. This constant contemplation of the mystery will transform us little by little; it is in looking at the original that the image renews itself. It is in looking at Jesus that we become like him. The meditation of the Rosary is not complete unless our life changes, unless we seek to model our concrete existence on the mystery contemplated (cf. SR 65-67).

⁶² Let us remember that Montfort insists that we pray the Liturgy of the Hours with the same dispositions: cf. RM 31.

137. In his Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, Pope John Paul II calls us to the spiritual and missionary riches of the rosary which is a compendium of the gospel and a path to proclamation. The pope stresses that the rosary is a prayer which helps us to be conformed to Christ with Mary.

“The Rosary mystically transports us to Mary’s side as she is busy watching over the human growth of Christ in the home of Nazareth. This enables her to train us and to mould us with the same care, until Christ is “fully formed” in us (cf. Gal 4:19). This role of Mary, totally grounded in that of Christ and radically subordinated to it, “in no way obscures or diminishes the unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power.” This is the luminous principle expressed by the Second Vatican Council which I have so powerfully experienced in my own life and have made the basis of my episcopal motto: *Totus Tuus*. The motto is of course inspired by the teaching of Saint Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort, who explained in the following words Mary’s role in the process of our configuration to Christ: “Our entire perfection consists in being conformed, united and consecrated to Jesus Christ. Hence the most perfect of all devotions is undoubtedly that which conforms, unites and consecrates us most perfectly to Jesus Christ. Now, since Mary is of all creatures the one most conformed to Christ Jesus, it follows that, among all devotions, that which most consecrates and conforms a soul to our Lord is devotion to Mary, his Holy Mother, and that the more a soul is consecrated to her the more it will be consecrated to Jesus Christ.” Never as in the Rosary do the life of Jesus and that of Mary appear so deeply joined. Mary lives only in Christ and for Christ!”⁶³

Mortification

138. It can seem strange to propose mortification as a means of formation... Yet the world today is full of mortifications which we could call “secular”: athletic or military training, physical exercise of all kinds to keep in shape, diets, the diverse “sacrifices” imposed by the choices we make, etc., to say nothing of the “mortifications” imposed by different circumstances in life: lack of food, clothing, or shelter; sicknesses, poverty, human dramas, trials, etc. Mortification is a “normal” part of every growth process; we have only to think of the different renunciations which our choices impose, the different renunciations that lead us to self-mastery, to accept our limits, which keep us in contact with the real...

139. For Montfort, mortification is a spiritual path which places us in the footsteps of Christ by causing us to participate in his paschal mystery (cf. FC 13 ff.; LEW 194 which cites Gal 5:24, 2Cor 4:10, Lk 9:23; Rom 6:4, 8). It is also the consequence of the radical choice which we make in deciding to follow Christ (FC 7-12), in becoming “disciples of a crucified God” (cf. FC 26). We must die to ourselves in order to live in God, to lose one’s life in order to save it.

140. Mortification as a way of renunciation allows us to escape the snares of false wisdoms so we can unite ourselves with the true Wisdom. Gradually, it purifies and transforms the three disordered desires (“concupiscence”) of false wisdoms (cf. FC 4, 6, 7, 9, 11). It is a challenge for the world of today, where the attitude “I-want-everything-immediately” reigns as king; but

⁶³ John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 15.

mortification could be a spiritual therapy for the world, teaching us to say no to certain desires and needs or at least to delay their gratification, to say no also to those things which are the most legitimate, to which one could normally say one has a right (LCM 9). It is not a contempt of the flesh, but it re-orders it, reorients it toward God. This straightening out – or purification – of our predispositions does not come without suffering, and often it is crucifying.

141. Mortification does not only concern the flesh and its disordered desires, it also touches our will: to renounce our will in order to cling to the will of God. “This is easier said than done, especially when we see how the world, not excluding the world of ecclesiastics, is bent on doing its own will and when we see the disorders brought about by those whose self-will insists on doing only what suits them because such is their good pleasure” (RM 19). Mortification is a profound dynamic which orients us toward God by clearing from our path everything that could stop us or slow us down. It is detachment and freedom; it make us “free from”... (cf. PM 7) so that we may be “free for”... (cf. PM 8-12). For following Christ and doing his will! It is also a witness to our love for Jesus Christ, a witness to our recognition of the One who loved us and delivered himself up for us (cf. LEW 154-181).

A loving and true devotion to the Blessed Virgin

142. To be Montfortians is to be children and servants of Mary (cf. PM 11, 12). This involves entering into a very special relationship with her; living a Marian dependence and submission, to follow after Jesus (cf. LEW 205, 223; TD 18, 139, 140, 155, 156, 198; SM 46). It means to take Mary as our Mother, our Mentor, our spiritual Teacher, our enlightened Guide (cf. TD 209). Father de Montfort clarifies this Marian attitude as a profound disposition of our being, in the “interior practices” of true devotion: *to do all our actions through Mary, with Mary, in Mary and for Mary, in order to do them more perfectly through Jesus Christ, with Jesus Christ, in Jesus and for Jesus* (cf. TD 257-265; SM 44-49, 67).

143. In this school of holiness (cf. SM 3), Mary must be, par excellence, our Formator (*Forma Dei*, the mould of God: cf. SM 16-18; TD 219-220), the one who forms us and transforms us, by the Holy Spirit, in Jesus Christ, and unites us to him (cf. LEW 214; TD 33; SM 56), by our consecration which makes us slaves of Jesus in Mary.⁶⁴

144. This transformation, the work of Mary and the Holy Spirit, touches every dimension of our person. If we place ourselves with confidence and simplicity under her spiritual direction (cf. TD 107, 218-223), Mary has us pass from false devotions to true devotion (cf. TD 90 ff.; LEW 216-217; PM 12; RW 144), that is to say, she leads us toward a more and more authentic and unified relationship with God. She teaches us the humility of heart and spirit which opens us to the Mysteries of God in simplicity of faith (cf. TD 93-95). She harmonizes in us the different parts of our being, leading us on the road of unification, attuning our exterior with our interior self, thereby rendering us always more consistent and true to ourselves, to others and to God (cf. TD 96, 97-100, 106, 109), on a path of holiness (cf. TD 118). Finally she teaches us true love, an ardent love which brings us towards God, a love which makes us free with the freedom of God, a love which opens us to him in the most complete confidence (cf. TD 110, 169, 215).

⁶⁴ In the prayers which he invites us to recite every day (RM 29), Montfort has us ask Mary for the grace of being *instructed* by her. Cf. the formula for Consecration (LEW 227), and the concluding prayers of his third method for saying the rosary – traditionally the most used in the Congregation – and of the Little Crown.

Living as the Response to Montfort's Prayer

145. We have mentioned several times the cumulative and necessarily linked elements (often called “notes”) without which there is no authentic Montfortian mission (cf. S 7). Could we not say that the itinerary and the means which we just proposed are the “notes” of all authentic Montfortian formation? If we neglect one of these elements in our ongoing formation, would Montfort recognize us in his icon of the Montfortian apostle? – By adopting the itinerary and the means that he proposes, we will become the living response to his prayer: *Da Matri tuae liberos! Give your Mother free men!*

Chapter 6

FORMED IN MARY TO BECOME DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST WISDOM INCARNATE

*Virgin most faithful, make me in everything
so committed a disciple, imitator and slave
of Jesus, your Son, incarnate Wisdom,
that I may become, through your intercession and example,
fully mature with the fullness which Jesus possessed on earth,
and with the fullness of his glory in heaven.*
(LEW 227)

Allowing ourselves to be formed by Mary the *faithful virgin*

146. Montfortian formation introduces us into the same dynamic of fidelity which Montfort lived. He knew how to appropriate and welcome in an exceptional way the role of the Virgin Mary as mistress and guide on his path of becoming conformed to Christ (cf. PM 25). *In the school of Mary*, our path of formation becomes a *specific itinerary of Montfortian Consecration*: we unite ourselves with the pure faith of Mary (TD 214) and acquire an intelligence of spirit which reflects her *gentle welcome* of and *obedience* to the will of God (cf. Lk 1:26 ff. and Jn 19:25 ff.). It is here that each Montfortian seeks to be always better acquainted with the wise humility of Mary and “the freedom to learn throughout life, in every age and season, in every human ambient and context, from every person and every culture.”⁶⁵ Just as Jesus depended upon Mary for his humanity, we depend upon her for our renewed humanity.

147. This itinerary helps us develop *attitudes* which make our path of formation possible and practical. Here are some main ones:

- The *complete, active and responsible involvement* of the person, who remains the primary one responsible for the educative process (cf. Jn 2:1-11).
- A *fundamentally positive attitude* in confronting reality, an attitude of *reconciliation and gratitude* regarding one’s own personal story and regarding others’ (cf. Lk 1:39-56).
- *Interior freedom* and the desire to allow oneself “to be taught by any fragment of truth and beauty found around them.”⁶⁶
- The capacity for a *relationship with otherness*, that is for a fruitful integration – active and passive – of reality which is other and different from *me*, and even to let myself be formed by it (cf. Lk 2:33 ff.).

⁶⁵ Starting Afresh from Christ, 15.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

148. If the spirituality of Montfort addresses itself to all Christians, it is certainly destined in the first place for those who are called to become *liberos*, those true servants and “children of Mary... conceived and begotten by her love, nurtured and reared, upheld by her and enriched with her graces” (PM 11).

149. Sustained by these *Marian attitudes*, our path of formation discloses itself more and more as a *road of ongoing conversion*, since it will be centred on an authentic experience of God revealed in Jesus Christ, and built on accepting the mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection in each dimension and in every season of life. This ongoing process invites us to *dwell with Mary, becoming like her*, as the *paschal mystery* is accomplished in us: allowing the Father to act in us by the Spirit who liberates, even if letting him act costs us dearly. It is a continual abandonment of our very life led by the Spirit into his hands, as much on the personal level as on the communal level.

150. Human reality is often made up of crises, death and sin. If we want our religious and missionary life to incarnate itself within this reality in a prophetic way and to be present there as a witness to the God of Life (Acts 1:8), we must nourish our life with this paschal dynamic which integrates death and life, limits and hopes, needs and assets. A spirituality open to transformation, to conversion, to hope, will give birth to a paschal spirituality marked by eschatological tension. Such must be the spirituality of “Montfortians, in a word, indissolubly united to Mary and filled with this Spirit that the Risen Christ has sent to us and whose function it is to guide humanity into all the truth (cf. Jn 16:13).”⁶⁷

151. The process which leads us into this habit of being is precisely the one Montfort proposes when he describes the Perfect Consecration to Jesus through Mary (cf. TD 120-ff.). In fact, if we substitute the expression *formation process* for the word *devotion* in TD 121 we receive from Montfort a valuable description of our journey of ongoing formation.

This [formation process] “consists in giving oneself entirely to Mary in order to belong entirely to Jesus through her. It requires us to give:

- 1 Our body with its senses and members;
- 2 Our soul with its faculties;
- 3 Our present material possessions and all we shall acquire in the future;
- 4 Our interior and spiritual possessions, that is, our merits, our virtues and good actions of the past, the present and the future.

In other words, we give her all that we possess both in our natural life and in our spiritual life as well as everything we shall acquire in the future in the order of nature, of grace, and of glory in heaven. This we do without any reservation, not even of a penny, a hair, or the smallest good deed. And we give for all eternity without claiming or expecting, in return for our offering and our service, any other reward than the honour of belonging to Our Lord through Mary and in Mary, even though our Mother were not – as in fact she always is – the most generous and appreciative of all God’s creatures” (TD 121).

**To allow Mary to form us:
To choose dependence as a path of freedom**

⁶⁷ Fr. Gérard Lemire, The present needs of formation, S.G. 04/1989, 3.3.2.

152. The first step for beginning again on this formative journey always involves the availability of the person to be transparent to himself, to others, and above all to God. We do this by allowing ourselves to be shaped by Mary. We become available and transparent to her as we draw near to her. Mary is the one who “forms” us when we hand over our entire selves to her like liquefied wax which awaits the imprint of a seal. This dependence upon her is a way to freedom. The more we allow ourselves to be dependent upon Mary in life, and the more we do this concretely, the more we live in union with her Son. Through the total gift of ourselves to Mary, we belong completely to Christ, and we live more perfectly the vows of our baptism. Therefore, this “act of availability” which allows ourselves to be shaped by Mary is indispensable. It requires an intention to move down the path of availability without reservations. To embark instead upon a road on which we always keep for ourselves an “emergency exit” can be very risky.

153. As we place ourselves in the hands of Mary, the myth of freedom as complete independence or as absolute freedom of choice is exploded in favour of seeing freedom as commitment to, belonging to, and depending upon another. In moving to this perspective, we are on the wavelength of the New Testament which proposes freedom not as independence but as love. The intensity of this love also determines the freedom of commitment and dependence. No one can call himself free if he does not have the courage to give himself completely to the one whom he is called to love. In the long run this freedom lived in commitment will give unity to the person and make him a solid witness.

“Doing everything through Mary, with Mary, in Mary and for Mary, in order to do it more perfectly through Jesus, with Jesus, in Jesus and for Jesus” (TD 257).

154. In the interior practices which Father de Montfort proposes, we can see a practical illustration of the radicalism of the consecration, by which we make the choice of fidelity and of the total and absolute gift of ourselves. In fact, these practices are variations on a single central practice of giving ourselves completely to Jesus through Mary. Everything is oriented toward Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and our God, who alone can receive the total gift of our life. The interior practices are a true and proper pedagogy, because they aim at making available to Mary our entire being and acting and doing so in a progressive manner: behaviours, attitudes, feelings and motivations even to our fundamental choices, so that the entire life and mission of the Montfortian would be that of a son of God, a true disciple of Christ, led by the Spirit. To accept to be educated and formed in this way is to accept to be guided by Mary and to take to heart this path of knowledge and liberation.

Learning to do every action through Mary

155. To grow in our ability to act through Mary means to let ourselves be educated and led by the spirit of Mary (TD 258). We see ourselves and we see others and all reality through her spirit, which is the Holy Spirit of God.

156. Attuning ourselves to the spirit of Mary involves an ongoing renunciation of our ourselves and our own spirit of selfishness. To abandon oneself in Mary causes us to move away from our own inconsistencies (TD 259), the desires that do not correspond to what Mary calls us to. This brings about a new consciousness that helps us leave behind those discrepancies between

the values we proclaim and the way we actually live, that incoherence we discover in attentive observation of any of our choices: tastes and preferences, what we enjoy and suffer, the way we react to successes, to failures and conflicts, the way we express ourselves impulsively, etc.

157. To give ourselves to the spirit of Mary means to renounce our habitual way of reading our past and our present, of interpreting persons, occurrences, crosses, and sufferings. Mary, the woman who listens, reconciles us with ourselves, helping us to see the presence of God and God's providence in our life story, which then can become a story of salvation.

Learning to do everything with Mary

158. Our journey of self-emptying continues! After having seriously looked at our own dissonant needs, after having been taught to read our story through Mary, we take her way of acting as the model for our behaviour.

“We must look upon Mary, although a simple human being, as the perfect model of every virtue and perfection, fashioned by the Holy Spirit for us to imitate, as far as our limited capacity allows. In every action then we should consider how Mary performed it or how she would perform it if she were in our place. For this reason, we must examine and meditate on the great virtues she practised during her life, especially:

1 Her lively faith, by which she believed the angel's word without the least hesitation, and believed faithfully and constantly even to the foot of the Cross on Calvary.

2 Her deep humility, which made her prefer seclusion, maintain silence, submit to every eventuality and put herself in the last place.

3 Her truly divine purity, which never had and never will have its equal on this side of heaven.

And so on for her other virtues” (TD 260).

159. To act with Mary enables us to be conformed to her Son, because Mary is the mould of God in which we can be shaped anew. “Anyone who finds this mould and casts himself into it, is soon transformed into our Lord because it is the true likeness of him” (TD 260).⁶⁸

160. To cast ourselves in this mould who is Mary calls us to leave behind our hardness of heart and to become pliable, adapting ourselves to her. We make our own Mary's program of action, her attitudes, feelings and virtue. We renounce our own habitual ways of doing things, our typical approach to making choices and judging. We are moved and guided by her style, which is an evangelical style of life. In imitating Mary we prefer to be guided by her rather than to entrust ourselves to our own initiatives.

Learning to do everything in Mary

161. The interior practice of emptying ourselves so that we can be formed more and more into the image of Jesus leads us to dwell within Mary, a space wide open to God's presence and action, the enclosed garden of an earthly paradise in which God can cultivate us (TD 261-64). Mary becomes like an oratory in which we can forget ourselves and become immersed in prayer

⁶⁸ Cf. SM 16-18.

(SM 47). Acting in Mary draws us into a continuous awareness of God's grace at work. This is the place where heaven and earth meet. The place of the Incarnation becomes the place of our divinisation. This is where we are protected and nourished (TD 33). If we remain in this place, we gradually grow in familiarity with Mary, and we grow in our awareness of Jesus present with us.

162. This mystery of our life and our action in Mary is well expressed by the Carmelite, Jessica Powers, in her poem *Advent*:

“I live my Advent in the womb of Mary.

...

I shall be born of her by blessed grace.
I wait in Mary-darkness, faith's walled place,
with hope's expectance of nativity.

I knew for long she carried me and fed me,
guarded and loved me, though I could not see.
But only now, with inward jubilee,
I come upon earth's most amazing knowledge:
someone is hidden in this dark with me.”

Acting in Mary and dwelling in her brings us into the continual presence of Jesus, Wisdom made flesh in Mary.

Learning to do everything for Mary

163. Gradually, we can leave self-interest behind and allow the subtle and hidden selfish motives in our actions to be rooted out. As this happens, we can act for Mary and be at her service. We act in total commitment to her, realizing that the glory of God is the ultimate end of all our actions (TD 265, SM 49). We will attract everyone possible to her, in order to make her Son loved more and more. Continuing our path of self-emptying, in all of these actions, we expect nothing in return.

164. These interior practices which Montfort describes are really different ways of looking at one continuous process of self-emptying. Our consecration is an ongoing handing over of ourselves completely and entirely to Jesus at the hands of Mary, until we are, in a sense, left naked, covered only by the waters of our baptism, and trusting completely in Jesus whose life flows within us through this baptism.

165. Living *for Mary* is far from a matter of simply adopting pious thoughts. It is an attitude that informs our way of acting, shapes everything we do, affects how we are with each other and guides our approach to those to whom we minister.

166. This journey does not occur in a superficial way, but in the depths of a person. It is a journey away from false wisdom and our false sense of self toward the truth of ourselves. To remain under the watchful eye of Mary often requires an effort (cf. TD 259, 3°). We may feel the temptation to evade her light, at least for a moment, in order to be less hampered in doing what pleases us rather than what she would desire, which is to say, our good. When we begin to love and welcome Mary as our model and Mother, we will begin to feel ever more strongly the call to become what we truly are. It will be the truth which will set us free as we entrust

ourselves to Mary, Our Lady of the Spirit of Truth, and she, with her loving presence, will teach us to say yes to the Truth.

The goal of our formation process: to be conformed to Christ

167. In the first part of this volume, we have seen the model of formation that, as Montfortians, we must learn to respect if we wish to conform ourselves to the Spirit of Christ. In the school of Mary we prepare the ground every day so that our life can take that form. Dwelling in Mary, one is already in the process of building, in freedom, a new maturity, giving to one's self a new name. Formation enables us to enter in a lasting and steady way into a new reality, a new context of meaning and value. Only in this way can one speak of a becoming new creation in Christ; otherwise we are simply like tourists who briefly acquaint themselves with a new place, but then return to their old country.

168. The school of Mary, together with the help of human mediation, enables us to be guided in this formation process, capable of identifying the object of the journey, experiencing this new identity which emerges and entrusting ourselves to it. This implies both a passivity and an activity: to decide in a free way to let oneself be shaped in Mary into the likeness of Christ. To be conformed to Christ, our norm, our rule, our life: this is the goal of our daily offering into her hands.

To do everything through Christ

169. At the heart of formation there is an act of faith: not a generic faith, but faith in Someone. We contemplate Jesus in the light of the Montfortian charism, and so are shaped according to the sentiments of Christ toward the Father, toward humanity, toward life and death. This contemplation brings to the fore the mystical dimension of Montfortian life. As we are able to taste and welcome in the depths of our being what God is doing within us, we are drawn into the mystery of God's love and shaped by it. From this perspective, the freedom of the Montfortian is mystical in nature. Freedom flows from an attraction to be illuminated by Beauty and to contemplate the splendor of the Truth who is Jesus. True freedom does precede mystical experience: the more we are attracted by the gift of God, the more we will be free in our choices. The chaste love of consecrated celibacy is the expression of this mystical aspect of our vocation and would be incomprehensible without it.

170. Every program of forming the new man should start out again and again from a relationship with the Lord, remaining before him, feeling ourselves held in his loving gaze (Mk 10:21). Dwelling in Christ leads to action through Christ. In his sight we learn to receive the depths of an eternal and infinite love which touches the roots of our being and enfolds our life, calling us to coherent choices.⁶⁹

To do everything with Christ

171. If Christ is at the centre of everything (TD 61), he begins to animate every choice which is undertaken with faith in him. Our formation implies a transformation in which we increasingly desire to do only what will help to bring about the reign of God. We share in the apostolic zeal of Jesus and we make our choices according to a logic which comes from the

⁶⁹ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptionis Donum*, 3.

One who has brought fire upon the earth. Our interaction with persons and things, our desires and the projects we undertake become focused on acting with Christ.

172. If Christ is at the beginning and the end of everything, the existential motivation for what we do, then our entire life will be marked with the same passion of Jesus Christ, eternal Wisdom; we will recognize this love everywhere and in every circumstance. In doing this we will bring the saving love of Jesus to everyone we meet.

To do everything in Christ

173. Our hearts begin to beat with the same feelings of Christ in a more and more habitual way, no longer out of duty. Living and acting in the love and compassion of the heart of Christ becomes natural and satisfying, even with the fatigue that it brings. This formation of the heart is possible only with frequent prayer, where our life is hidden in Christ. Our hearts grow larger as we remain in silent adoration before God, allowing the Father, who has begotten the Son, eternal and incarnate Wisdom, to beget in us the sentiments of his Son. Only in time spent before the Father, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit can this transformation take effect in us.

To do everything for Christ

174. If the heart begins to beat in a new way, then life changes. It is possible to acquire new habits, new styles of acting with the steadfastness of one who knows he has discovered (or rediscovered) a treasure. We become formed in a Christ-centred consciousness, expressed in a sensibility, a quality of desire, a taste for virtue, a new energy to do good. The proof of this way of doing everything for Christ remains in the little things, in little decisions which make their presence felt again and again. Everything is important if it is expressive of this pathway of growth: from better preparation of the liturgy to celebrating frequently the sacrament of reconciliation; from thanking a confrere from the heart, to showing kindness to those who knock at our door; from carrying out the corporal works of mercy to not losing patience with the limitedness of the community or individual confreres. This way of acting becomes a habit translated in concrete gestures.

Living in Relationship

175. This journey of ongoing formation is one which develops the Montfortian as a man in relationship in such a way that he expresses Mary's relationship to God.

176. The Montfortian is a man called to live in a Company, a man available to the Holy Spirit and to those in leadership; a man attentive to the urgent needs of the Church. This requires an ability to live within a network of relationships. Formation helps him and enables him to "live in relationship" – not only with formators, but with himself, with others, with God and with all of reality. These relationships themselves act as formative influences in the life of the Montfortian.

177. On this "path of relationship" or of availability, there are several skills which we seek to develop as we grow in the art of being with others. These include

- an ever developing self-understanding and an affective maturity;
- an openness to transparency and self-disclosure (In this, Montfort's ability to speak

about himself in his letters can serve as an example.);

- a basic trust, for example in accepting changes of mission, in cooperating with those who have ministries of leadership in the community and in the Church;
- discernment as learning and exercising obedient availability;
- a respect for others;
- an ability to deal with differences and conflict;
- an ability to share as a company on a journey of faith.

178. Our ongoing formation is marked by an authentic devotion; it is an interior journey which opens up to confidence, to constancy, to holiness; its only goal is God alone in Mary (TD 105-110). This process of formation enables us to acquire a state of soul which, according to Father de Montfort, lies at the heart of consecration to Jesus through Mary. We learn to persevere in the spirit of this devotion – giving ourselves completely to Jesus without reservation, placing ourselves in Mary, the mould of God, living in Mary so that Jesus living in Mary might come and live in us.

179. Perseverance requires a constant cultivation of the Tree of Life which is planted within us so that it yields its lasting fruit who is Jesus (SM 70-78). The quintessentially Montfortian act of emptying ourselves and handing ourselves over by consecrating ourselves to Jesus at the hands of Mary will never take root in us if it remains simply an occasional gesture or an empty ritual (SM 44). Remaining focused on living our Montfortian consecration is the most difficult thing in this world filled with distractions (TD 89). To persevere in the spirit of this consecration is a challenge that can only be undertaken with the grace of God.

“Some – the great majority – will stop short at the threshold and go no further. Others – not many – will take but one step into its interior. Who will take a second step? Who will take a third? Finally who will remain in it permanently? Only the one to whom the Spirit of Jesus reveals the secret. The Holy Spirit himself will lead this faithful soul from strength to strength, from grace to grace, from light to light, until at length he attains transformation into Jesus in the fullness of his age on earth and of his glory in heaven” (TD 119).

THIRD PART

A PATH TO WALK TOGETHER

COORDINATING OUR FORMATION

*Holy Spirit, be ever mindful that it is you who,
with Mary as your faithful spouse, are to bring forth
and fashion the children of God. In her and with her,
you brought forth the Head of the Church and, in the same way,
you will bring all his members into being...
All the saints who have ever existed or will exist until the end of time
will be the outcome of your love working through Mary.*
(PM 15)

180. It is not as isolated individuals that we learn to become Montfortians. We make this journey together, united in a single company; we grow and learn together so that together we can carry out our mission. Consequently, we not only learn how to make this formative journey, we learn how to walk it together. This requires organization and coordination, tasks that are the particular concern of those in roles of leadership. Nevertheless, no organization and coordination of the path of formation can succeed unless we all participate and cooperate.

181. Formation is the joint work of God and humans, who unite their efforts to bring the person to grow in the image of Christ. The experience of the love of the Father – bound to the feeling of also being loved by Jesus and Mary – and the attentive presence of confreres, create for the candidate and then for the professed Montfortian the warm environment where he will find the necessary conditions for his growth into full maturity.

182. Mutual prayer will re-enforce confidence, communication and understanding, which are essential between the one accompanying and the one being accompanied, all the while respecting the rhythm of the search for his identity. To shape the person, to help him respond always with more generosity, is a process of growth in a relationship of friendship which requires divine and human intervention.

183. Encouraged by the joint action of those involved at different moments and in diverse ways, the Montfortian will learn throughout his life to deepen his sense of call, to read the signs of the times, while acquiring the tools necessary for his mission. Thus he will achieve the grace to complete a journey of creative fidelity with peace and joy.

Chapter 7

COMPANIONS ON THE JOURNEY THOSE INVOLVED IN FORMATION

*The Christian and fatherly love I bear you is so great
that you will always have a place in my heart as long as I live and even into eternity.
I ask you all... to follow me with your prayers...
I am seeking divine Wisdom; help me to find it...
Alone and poor (cf. Ps 24.16) as I am, I would certainly perish
were I not supported by Our Lady and the prayers of good people,
especially your own.
These are obtaining for me from God
the gift of speech or divine Wisdom...*

(Letter to the People of Montbernage, passim)

184. The list of those involved, or the agents of formation, which we give now may be something of a surprise to some. Remember that it is a matter of forming the entire man and everything within the man. Is there a person, an aspect, which we can really pass by if we want to give every opportunity to form apostles capable of building community life and serving the mission, in whom Montfort will recognize the Company for whom he prayed?

The Trinity, the Blessed Virgin and Montfort

185. “It is **God himself** who calls one to a consecrated life within the Church”⁷⁰ and who maintains initiative as “the first and principal agent” during the whole journey of religious formation.⁷¹ The **Spirit** of truth is at work in the heart of each person... His anointing gives “desire, appreciation, judgement, choice.”⁷² “The work of the Spirit has always been associated with the **Virgin Mary**, Mother of God, and Mother of all the members of the people of God.”⁷³ In Mary, the Montfortian finds the “milieu” of his complete abandonment to the action of God and the joy which flows from this. The Montfortian journey is evidently inspired and guided by the spiritual and apostolic project of **St. Louis Marie**.

The Church Community

186. “The Church as such is the communal subject which has the grace and responsibility to accompany those whom the Lord calls to become his ministers.”⁷⁴ “The task of formation is necessarily carried on in communion with **the Church**, of which religious are members, filially

⁷⁰ *Potissimum Institutioni*, 19.

⁷¹ The Teaching of the Church on Religious Life – Essential elements, SCRIS (1983), 47.

⁷² *Potissimum Institutioni*, 19.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁷⁴ *Pastores dabo vobis*, 65.

obedient to its pastors.”⁷⁵

187. Following the example of our founder, the Montfortian lives with loyalty his communion with the Holy Father and the bishops (cf. RM 22), and gives clear witness to it. He realizes: “It is impossible to contemplate the face of God without seeing it shine in that of the Church. To love Christ is to love the Church in her persons and institutions.”⁷⁶

The Individual as the One with Primary Responsibility

188. It is the individual person who “holds the first responsibility for saying ‘yes’ to the call which he received and for accepting all the consequences of this response.”⁷⁷ The Montfortian must be convinced that he is the one primarily responsible for his formation, his growth and his personal renewal. It is up to him to welcome what is offered to him, integrating it into himself, and organizing his life in function of his mission.

The General Council and the Council of the Entity Concerned⁷⁸

189. To love means to give life. It is to create a movement, to nourish it, to feed it. Animation constitutes a vital dimension of the exercise of authority, which is essentially a service to fraternal life, through structures which take account of the fact that each one is “his brother’s keeper” (Gen 4:9).

190. As far as formation goes, this animation follows the normal structures of the Company. It belongs to the Superior General and his Council to give orientations and lines of direction to Montfortian formation and to see to it that they are implemented by those who have that task at the level of the entities of the congregation.

191. In this domain as in all others, the exercise of authority carries with it risks and challenges. With that in mind, the superiors, in addition to basing their decisions on their experience and their desire to utilise personnel well and to respect norms, will always be ready to consult experts and the formation commission of the entity. They will also listen willingly to confreres who have particular gifts of discernment and fraternal communication.

The Community

192. Child of a human and divine family, the Montfortian learns to grow and mature in his relationship with God and at the same time with his community: “Through the fraternal life each one learns to live with those whom God has put at his or her side.”⁷⁹ Next to the candidate or religious, the role of the **community**⁸⁰ must not be lacking; it is called to be formative because it “permits each one of its members to grow in fidelity to the Lord according to the charism of his or her institute.”⁸¹

⁷⁵ *Potissimum Institutioni*, 23.

⁷⁶ *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 32.

⁷⁷ *Potissimum Institutioni*, 29; cf. *The Montfortian Rationis Institutionis* (1987), 68.

⁷⁸ Cf. *The Montfortian Rationis Institutionis* (1987), 19-22.

⁷⁹ *Vita Consecrata*, 67.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁸¹ *Potissimum Institutioni*, 27, cf. also 15.

193. It is in community that the Montfortian learns the *art of everyday communication*: with God, by participating in common prayer; with confreres, by learning to know them better; and with himself, by discovering how to appropriate impressive elements which strike him in the personal example or action of the confreres.

194. The community thus becomes a privileged school – a divine laboratory one could say – of humanisation, freedom, obedience and humility. If one really cultivates working together (*faire ensemble*), the apostolic ministry will thereby become not only more inventive and fruitful, but it will also become more and more the evangelical witness which it should be.

195. It is good to repeat that there are in certain communities some confreres who, even though they have no official role to play in the strictly defined domain of formation, are nevertheless models, living rules, sources of inspiration and growth for the confreres who live with them.

The Formation Personnel

196. In every educational process, it is indispensable to receive the formator in faith, and to see clearly his “sacramental” dimension, which makes him the sign and instrument of Christ who is in the process of building up his Body. When formators carry out their mission as a team, they become models of collaboration and this improves the coordination of the journey.

Given the importance of his role in the process of ongoing formation, we will develop the role of the formator with all suitable depth in the second volume.

The Spiritual Director

197. Since the beginning of monastic and religious life, the presence of a *spiritual guide* has always been determinative in the formation of disciples. The life of St. Louis-Marie is a good example of this.

198. In our world, where incertitude about even the meaning of life and the relevance of faith prevails, the young person, the adult, even the older person can come to doubt his convictions. That is why for us, who have to live in this world where so many fundamental values are put on trial at the same time we want to witness to the world to come, the presence of a spiritual guide is doubly essential. Enlightened, discrete and available, the spiritual director facilitates a continual evaluation of the authenticity of our pilgrimage. We truly need a sure guide, who knows and foresees the pathway, who accompanies and encourages – in daily life as well as at difficult moments – without taking responsibility for decisions away from the disciple.

Lay People

199. The charism of St. Louis-Marie de Montfort, sustained by the Holy Spirit for the good of all and made explicit by the Church, is open to the communion and participation of all the members of the People of God. The Montfortian can find in lay people, especially in our associates, not only collaborators in the management of works, but also “the just relationships of communion and a renewed experience of evangelical communion and mutual charismatic esteem resulting in a complementarity which respects the differences.”⁸² *The Letter to the*

⁸² Starting Afresh from Christ, 31.

People of Montbernage reminds us that Montfort considered them important agents in his own ongoing formation.

The Poor

200. The Montfortian, faithful to our founder and his charism, will have a marked preference for the first beatitude: “Blessed are you who are poor” (Lk 6:20), a fundamental proposition of Jesus for entering into the Kingdom, which *begins here and now*.

201. So as not to fall into incoherence, he will not only be poor in spirit, but he will cultivate the spirit of poverty, which will make him an authentic witness of Providence, following Jesus, who, full of trust, emptied himself of everything in total abandonment to the Father.

202. Closeness to the poor, living side by side with them, will be a criterion of discernment for our involvements and our apostolic efforts: we should also allow ourselves to be evangelised by the poor and be placed more easily on the path of an authentic conversion. Closeness to the poor means also closeness to those who are rejected, to the sick, the aged, the troubled, without forgetting immigrants and refugees. This criterion will be expressed in our life and our mission, whether through closeness to them and tenderness towards them, or through a recognition of ourselves, with Mary, as the poor of Yahweh. These essential lines of attention constitute for us a light which, in addition to purifying and transforming us, illuminates an evaluation of the quality of our religious life, our life of poverty, obedience and chastity.⁸³

⁸³ Cf. Fr. William Considine, *The Spiritual and Apostolic Charism of St. Louis-Marie and the Montfort Missionaries Today*, S.G. 01/2001, 3.1 and 3.2

Chapter 8

A WELL ORDERED COMPANY LEVELS OF RESPONSIBILITY

*Superiors should fulfil their office generously,
building with their brothers and sisters a community in Christ
in which God is sought and loved before everything.*⁸⁴

203. Formation is the work of God and people: thus it always needs human mediation, from the involvement of the congregation in general to that of each confrere in particular. No one has the right to exempt himself from responsibility for his formation. Ongoing formation is a complex and many faceted reality, which requires a well orchestrated participation and the solidarity of all the members of the congregation.

204. In fact, the subject and the one responsible for ongoing formation is as much the individual confrere as it is the one who carries out a leadership role. The place of ongoing formation is the community, but at the same time it is also the apostolate itself and the locale where one lives. The moments of ongoing formation are ordinary days with their flow of activities, but also extraordinary initiatives organized by those in leadership.

205. In addition, part of the style proper to the government of the Montfortian apostolic community is to “make it become what it should be” (S 57), and to take account of the principles of subsidiarity, co-responsibility, and unity in diversity (S 53-56). Thus, a good coordination among the different levels is necessary for creating the conditions favourable to the process of animation, of participation, and of responsibility in respect to the creativity of the person, obedience to authority and the unity of the congregation.

At the Level of the Congregation

206. The Superior General and his Council are those responsible for the overall orientations of formation in the Company. Through every means possible, they strive to create a mentality which encourages it, not only on the level of ideas, but also in practice, by urging on each Montfortian to a real growth in his fidelity to his own vocation, by participating in initiatives, and collaborating with international programmes of formation.

207. The program for ongoing formation proposed by the General Leadership must not only be clear for all, but each one must understand that he is connected to all the confreres, and that no one can consider his involvement to be something optional.

208. Promoting this mentality and praxis of ongoing formation can be done by instruments

⁸⁴ The Teaching of the Church on Religious Life – Essential Elements, III, Some Fundamental Norms, SCRIS, 1983, 44.

which the General Administration arranges: circular letters, colloquies, the creation of appropriate commissions, proposed themes, offering subsidies, the programming of formation itineraries for a determined time on the general or inter-provincial level, on-site supervision, personal contacts, etc.

209. In addition, we must emphasize that participation in a common formation project – and the acceptance of its content – demonstrates in itself the interest, fraternal esteem, encouragement and attention we have for one another. It is a tangible sign of a sense of belonging to the congregation, which is one in its diversity.

At the Level of the Provinces or Delegations

210. The Superiors of Provinces and Delegations, along with their councils, have the responsibility to promote formation as a vital necessity for the growth of each and every one (cf. S 48). Many of the orientations of the central Government are necessarily general and must be adapted and integrated in the national and local programs which take account of particular aspects. It is up to those responsible for the entities to define a well adapted project for ongoing formation, to organize special activities, and to propose periodic initiatives (monthly or annually). This will be done in constant reference to the program of the congregation, taking account of the local needs and possibilities, and of the latest developments in the field.

211. All the confreres and all the communities should be involved, keeping in mind issues of the age of the confreres, the diversity of ministries, differing roles and all other aspects which could encourage the coming together of diverse groupings.

212. In countries where national (or international) conferences of religious or episcopal conferences offer periodic programs of study and religious or pastoral reflection, we will look to insure a correct balance, without losing sight of the fact that the religious family is the normal place, the natural agent, the providential mediation of formation for the consecrated person: it is there that one's identity is *hidden*; it is there that the Father has placed him and continues to bestow his gifts on him.

213. In addition, it is important today to bring us together, in order to retell the motivation for our religious consecration, to reforge the chain of a stronger fraternity with links of flesh and blood. In this way we can walk together in the same spirit and extend our vision and our action to horizons which go beyond the particular or the local.

At the Level of the Local Community

214. Ongoing formation restores to the community its role as the natural place of apprenticeship and growth. Let us recall that the community is “a God-enlightened space in which to experience the hidden presence of the Risen Lord.”⁸⁵

215. The community must understand well that this role presumes the involvement of all its members, that each one should be responsible to the other and at the same time be available to be helped and formed by the other, or to accept the other – with his limits and weaknesses – as a mediation of the presence of God in his own life.

⁸⁵ *Vita Consecrata*, 42.

The Community in Itself

216. Common life constitutes the normal context where the consecrated person learns day by day the difficult art of growing together, of letting himself be formed and shaped by other confreres with whom there lies no bond of flesh or blood, and who, for that reason, become a mysterious instrument of the Father's formative action.

217. To do this, the community must offer the instruments and the means, for example:

- The daily, monthly, annual rhythm must be organized with a view to the growth of all;
- The central place reserved for prayer, above all the Eucharist, must create an atmosphere of the presence of God, indispensable for the witness of charity, forgiveness and reconciliation.
- A climate of mutual trust, encouraging a profound dialogue and participation in common initiatives.

The Role of the Superior

218. This theme will be taken up in detail in the second volume. Nevertheless, it is essential to recall the local superior's primary role of animation. He has the duty to thoroughly promote and use the means and the moments which will encourage a fraternal spirit in the community where it will truly be possible to have interaction among confreres, the fruit of sharing spiritual gifts through profound dialogue, and a discernment which includes fraternal correction.

The quality of life in a local community depends very often on the ability of the superior to put himself in contact with God and his confreres.

At the Level of the Individual

219. Ongoing formation is at the same time a right and a duty of each religious. Nothing can substitute for individual responsibility, just as no one else could ever take one's place in living the journey of growth and renewal to which one is called.

220. The Montfortian must be convinced from the beginning of his journey that, if he wants to reach the end, throughout his entire life he must remain:

- a disciple, always listening to the Master,
- a pilgrim, attentive at every step he makes to the direction to take,
- a servant of brothers and of the religious and pastoral community where the Lord has called him to grow.

221. Taking account of these situations, the Montfortian ought to seek out the help needed to go forward on his personal journey. In particular, he will have to:

- Discern the path of his spiritual life. He will do this by choosing an accompaniment and a program adapted to his personal needs, etc.
- Integrate the different aspects of his consecrated life – and priestly life, if he is a priest – while bearing a special concern for human and apostolic dimensions;
- Involve himself with generosity in community initiatives. His active and responsible participation will make of him a community builder;

- Go beyond the tension which can arise between the *apostolic man* and the *man of community*. Thus he will attain the balance of the *Montfortian man*.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Cf. Fr. William Considine, *Montfortian Apostolic Community* (S.G. 01/1996), *passim*. This tension could reveal itself as “dynamic.”

Chapter 9

AN INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

*Gather us in from every nation!...
Let all those worthy priests
who are to be found throughout the world...
come and join us.
(PM 18, 29)*

222. Montfort desired a Company, gathered from the nations, under the guidance of Mary, ready to build the Kingdom of God: Muster your chosen men from every corner of your dominions. Call them and gather them together (PM 26 and *passim*). The needs of his time impelled him to desire to live outside of his country and bring the Gospel to a distant land. Although his own ministry did not carry him in this direction, he dreamed of a group of priests who would live together, overcoming national and cultural barriers. Even if internationality was not a reality in the first years of the Congregation, it is a gift that we discover today, which allows us to respond fully to the mandate of Christ to go to the ends of the earth, living in communion with all and fulfilling the dream of our founder. We are a people coming from divers places, stemming from different languages and cultures.

223. Among the signs of the times today, we see in many societies increasing threats against respect for life, for human persons, for ethnic minorities and for the poor. Unchecked economic globalisation spreads, leading on the one hand to the enrichment and the insatiable power of the few, and on the other hand the awakening of a radical fundamentalism among groups of alienated people. The countries of the third world bear the greatest weight and consequences of this situation, yet no one can profess being exempt from the danger of being crushed by this destructive machine, that considers neither the common good nor the dignity of the person but takes count only of individual or national economic interests. For this reason the Pope especially calls religious to a “globalisation of solidarity” in favour of life and of a new world where there will reign a new political, economic and social order.

224. Seen in this context, internationality appears as a gift of God to the Church, to consecrated life and to many desiring to respond positively to the challenges of the Third World: “multicultural and international communities, called to ‘witness to the sense of communion among peoples, races, and cultures,’ are already in many areas a positive reality... They prove to be training grounds for integration and inculturation and at the same time a witness to the universality of the Christian message.”⁸⁷

225. The building of a new world requires the contribution of all, because such a world will be new, rich and beautiful to the extent that it will be able to integrate the newness, the richness and the beauty of different cultures, allowing people to live in harmony and mutual respect.

⁸⁷ Starting Afresh from Christ, 29.

What is Meant by Internationality

226. In addition to being a valued gift of God to the Church and to all who are committed to live as disciples of Christ, internationality is:

- a personal value and quality which transforms us little by little through an inner conversion, giving us an ability to respect all persons, a capacity to form a community which lives and works together for the Reign of God.
- a choice and a commitment that allows for cultivating everyday personal relationships of solidarity with confreres and with other people, and enables us to renounce prejudice and personal positions when there is a need for consensus in order to achieve a project inspired by God.
- an effort to unite together and build a community in search of projects which respond to the pressing needs of humanity. An international community exists not only to conserve an important work of the Congregation, but above all to be a place of listening to the Spirit and the cries of humanity, and a place of communal reflection and dialogue in search of authentic, comprehensive and effective responses.
- a prophetic witness to a divided world – “Placed as they are within the world’s different societies – societies frequently marked by conflicting passions and interests, seeking unity but uncertain about the ways to attain it – communities of consecrated life, where persons of different ages, languages and cultures meet as brothers and sisters, are signs that dialogue is always possible and that communion can bring differences into harmony”⁸⁸

227. This international perspective supposes

- an ongoing conversion illuminated by ongoing formation;
- unceasing personal and communal prayer, in order to obtain, keep, and perfect an international perspective;
- a sharing of life and thought which is the fruit of a daily effort of dialogue in fraternal charity;
- a global perspective expressed in an active interest in what is happening in the Congregation and in the world, beyond my local community and my particular entity.

The Subjects of Internationality

228. This gift of God is given:

- to persons: the ones primarily responsible who should understand their own identity and place it at the service of others
- to formators: Internationality is an indispensable quality for them to witness to and to transmit. They need to have a sensitivity and a respect for the different cultures of the candidates with whom they work.
- to the entire Congregation: which should create the most effective conditions to facilitate the growth of its members in this regard
- to the Church and to the world, which need an evangelical witness of unity in diversity, expressing Jesus’ desire to make disciples of all nations.

⁸⁸ *Vita Consecrata*, 51.

Enemies of Internationality

229. This gift of God finds resistance in the places in the human heart which can be closed to the action of God. The Montfortian religious should know how to identify in every circumstance and situation the enemies of internationality, which appear under many attitudes:

- in individualism, which even penetrates the minds of good and intelligent people, disguised under the appearance of a search for the greater good
- in intolerance, whether religious, ideological or social, often expressed in a fundamentalism which disdains everyone who is different from us
- in superiority or inferiority complexes, false nationalism or the ideology of a dominant culture.

Formation in Internationality

230. Accepting and developing this gift of God welcomed with love requires adequate formation in order to conserve it and make it effective. All of life should constitute a school of internationality, yet we should especially prepare new members and train them practically to be available to live in an international community. Above all, those responsible to lead international communities need international experiences before they begin their mandates in order to assimilate and then to transmit the values and the spirit of an international community in their exercise of leadership.

231. We need to discern the person's capacities for living internationality and help him to complete his formation by means of appropriate experiences, in order to give him an international perspective in the different dimensions of his personality:

- the human dimension: only a person who is mature and psychologically and sexually integrated can live international community life.
- the intellectual and cultural dimension: an open intelligence which acknowledges one's own limits and has learned to discover and integrate the richness of others, knowing that he can never become the same as the other. Consequently, living together should rest upon dialogue, upon the sincere search for the truth, and upon forgiveness and reconciliation. At a basic level, intellectual preparation for internationality should include learning other languages.
- the spiritual dimension: We do not live together for a human reason, but to bring about the Reign of God. We need not only nourish spiritual life with personal and community prayer, but we must also continually remember the goal of our living together.
- the Montfortian religious dimension: Walking in the footsteps of the poor apostles, living Montfortian spirituality facilitates internationality. Our Montfortian traditions have emphasized several concrete aspects present in the writings and the life of our founder: to be a company, a society, the value of obedience and charity, and more recently, the importance of religious consecration, apostolic community life, etc. Continual communal reflection on these elements will facilitate the growth of the international man.
- the Apostolic dimension: In whatever place or state the Montfortian finds himself, he

ought to see himself as an evangeliser. This fundamental dimension or “note” of his mission should teach him to live it in the different situations and the different places in which God calls him. Contact with the Spirit through prayer will give him the creativity and the imagination necessary to sow and cultivate the Word in whatever terrain and with different collaborators so that good fruit will grow and ripen according to the demands of the variety found in the garden of the Lord.

Practical Implications

232. An important goal of ongoing formation will be to expand our horizons so that we can see beyond the boundaries of one’s particular apostolate, particular country of origin or place of ministry, to become more and more conscious that we belong to a global Montfortian community.

233. International experiences of ongoing formation can help to develop this perspective as it strengthens fraternal bonds between people from different places, languages and cultures. These experiences can also provide an opportunity to see how Montfortian spirituality is being incarnated in different ways in different cultures.

234. The current reality of the Congregation calls us to be more aware of our interdependence on a regional and international level. One of the tasks of our common ongoing formation at this moment is to discover effective ways to express and to benefit from this interdependence.

235. In the area of the first stages of formation, we see in some entities of the Congregation the need to welcome many new candidates and to provide them with the necessary resources so that they may be firmly rooted in our charism and spirituality. In other entities, the small number of new candidates who enter sporadically makes it difficult if not impossible to develop an entire program of initial formation. Both of these situations call for new modes of international cooperation and collaboration which we are still discovering.

236. The challenge we face is to discover methods and processes for an authentic collaboration and a real sharing of resources. Continual honest and fraternal communication will help us greatly in this discovery. A truly international perspective avoids several attitudes:

- a lack of respect for the different cultures of candidates
- presuming that formation can occur in the same way in all places (a one size fits all approach) which fails to take account of the environment for formation
- a sense of nationalism or self-protectionism
- a false pride and a sense of self-sufficiency among those entities that have many candidates and a disinterest in formation in those entities that have few candidates
- a consumer approach to initial formation: e.g. an entity simply acting as a consumer of another entity’s formation program by sending a candidate there without taking an active interest in that formation program.

237. The need for greater collaboration among the entities of the Congregation in the field of initial and ongoing formation is very real; we will need to adopt new ways of planning, communicating and collaborating on the international level. Particular details about mechanisms that can be used for international collaboration in formation will be found in the second volume of this project for Montfortian formation.

238. Growth in our ability to be an international congregation, formation under the direction of confreres who possess international experience, unity where the bonds between us become stronger than national or cultural boundaries: this will permit us to approach the future with hope, to respond to the challenges of the third millennium, and to walk securely toward that community of love desired by Jesus: *Ut unum sint...* – That they may be one.

As we empty ourselves through our consecration to Jesus through Mary, we allow Christ to include us in his great act of reconciling all things in himself.

“For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:27-28).

“Bring us together and unite us and may all the glory be given to your holy name!” (PM 18).

CONCLUSION

Toward our Full Maturity in Christ

239. To carry out our mission in the spirit of St. Louis-Marie de Montfort, we seek to walk together in the footsteps of the poor apostles. Their path inspires our own. Just like them, in the course of the journey, we are ceaselessly moulded in the image of Christ and proclaim his message to those whom we are sent to serve.

240. When the apostles responded to the invitation of Jesus, they were not qualified for their missionary task. As they followed after Jesus and remained in his company, the roads of Palestine became a path of formation for them. This journey allowed them to see and listen to Jesus, as he proclaimed the Kingdom of God in word and deed. Their progress was slow, and often they did not understand. Even after years, they were still not ready to be missionaries. When the time came for Jesus to accept the cross, they ran away.

241. However, fear did not have the last word. The Risen Jesus passed through their locked doors of fear, and his encounter with his disciples re-formed them. They faithfully kept in their memory all that Jesus said and did in their midst. They opened themselves to the power of the Holy Spirit who transformed these frightened men hiding in an upper room into bold heralds of the Gospel. They allowed the gifts of the Spirit to take root in them as they went forth to make disciples of all nations. Their growth in faith and boldness brought them even to the point of giving their lives for the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus. Walking on his way, with the experience of his faithful friendship, they were led to believe with all their hearts Jesus' words to them: "remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt 28:20).

242. We walk in the footsteps of these apostles as Missionaries of the Company of Mary, sent out to bring the same Good News to the poor. Their following of Jesus serves as an inspiration to us as we let ourselves be shaped in his image, even while bringing that image to those who are entrusted to us. Our life experience reminds us of our own inadequacies, our fears, and our sinfulness. Aware of the obstacles we face, we trust in God alone. We believe that Jesus remains with us as we journey on. Our desire to continue our pilgrimage of formation opens us to the transformation of the Holy Spirit. Just as the Spirit formed the apostles, so too, step by step, over the course of our lifetime, that same Spirit will teach us how to walk together.

243. As we go, we are spurred on by the message that we bring and the destination we desire to reach as individuals and as an apostolic community – our full maturity in Christ: "speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love" (Eph 4:15-16).

In Fidelity to our Being and our Mission

244. Throughout the chapters of this first volume of our *Project of Formation*, one has without doubt an impression of déjà vu, of repetition. It was inevitable! Haven't we been invited to enter

always more deeply into the same *icon*? An icon does not reveal itself in a single visit. It discloses its mystery little by little to the one who knows how to spend time with it and gaze at it with close attention.

245. To use another image, we have gone down a spiral path which leads to the bottom of a mine open to sky. The scenery seems the same with each revolution, but if we really pay attention, we notice that the perspective is slightly new. And, even more important than appearances, to the extent to which we go deeper, we will discover a new vein of ore, whose quality and richness encourage us to continue the descent, because it is the promise of something still better.

246. Is not the story of our ongoing formation the story of our life? If we decide not to stop our journeying, in contemplation of our own mystery and that of the world in which we live; if we do not cease searching for a contemporary meaning in life, in people, in things which surround us; we discover in ourselves, among our confreres, and in the world, possibilities and marvels which re-energize our journey and make us men alive and free: the *liberos* of Montfort.

To do that, as we have seen, it is necessary “to let [our]selves be formed every day of [our] lives.”⁸⁹

247. In the upper room, Mary, Queen of Apostles, prayed united in one heart with those apostles. “The formation and education of the great saints who will come at the end of the world are reserved to her” (TD 35). For Mary to be able to do her work, we must abandon ourselves completely; we must allow Jesus to act in complete freedom, Jesus whom Mary presents to us and to whom she leads us. She allowed Jesus to be formed in her; she will help form us in the image of her Son! She taught Jesus how to walk; she will teach us how to walk together in the footsteps of the poor apostles!

In this way we will grow in fidelity to our being and our mission as Montfortians today. With St. Louis-Marie, may we pray each day of our pilgrimage: “Jesus, living in Mary, come and live in us!”... And, like him, let us offer ourselves completely to the action of Jesus: “I am all Yours!”

Da Matri tuae liberos!

⁸⁹ *Vita Consecrata*, 69.